



1s.

DU BOISGOBEY'S

IN THE  
SERPENTS'  
COILS.

SENSATIONAL NOVELS

LONDON: VIZETELLY & CO.,  
42, Catherine Street, Strand.

# VIZETELLY'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.

"The idea of publishing cheap one-volume novels is a good one, and we wish the series every success."—*Saturday Review*.

*In Crown 8vo, good readable type, and attractive binding, price 6s. each.*

## PRINCE ZILAH.

BY JULES CLARETIE,  
AUTHOR OF "THE MILLION."

TRANSLATED FROM THE 57TH FRENCH EDITION.

"M. Jules Claretie has of late taken a conspicuous place as a novelist."—*Times*.

T

"There is a good deal  
"One of those books

The Book that is

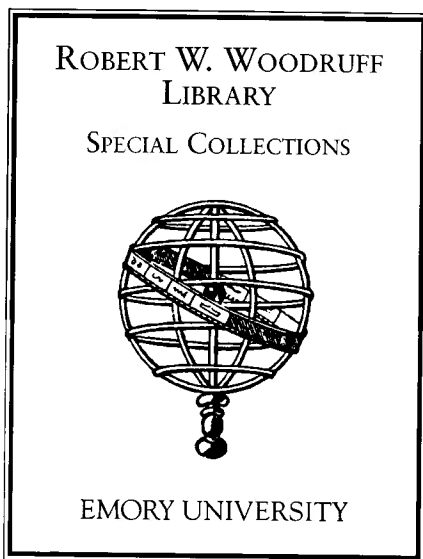
F

TRANSLATED, WITH

"This excellent version  
*Figaro*.

By

"In many respects  
and without pity; the  
a skill that fascinates



E.

dity."—*Society*.

French Academy.

E.

FRENCH EDITION.

the Channel."—*London*

A.,

are drawn with powerful  
colours, and with

## BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND DAWN.

BY INA L. CASSILIS,

AUTHOR OF "SOCIETY'S QUEEN," "STRANGELY WOOD: STRANGELY WON," &c.

"An ingenious plot, cleverly handled."—*Athenæum*.

"The interest begins with the first page, and is ably sustained to the conclusion."—*Edinburgh Courant*.

*In small 8vo, price 3s. 6d. each. Sixth Edition, carefully Revised.*

## A MUMMER'S WIFE. A Realistic Novel.

By GEORGE MOORE, Author of "A Modern Lover."

"A striking book, different in tone from current English fiction. The woman's character is a very powerful study."—*Athenæum*.

"'A Mummer's Wife' holds at present a unique position among English novels. It is a conspicuous success of its kind."—*Graphic*.

## VIZETELLY & CO.'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS—*Continued.*

3s. 6d. each.

FIFTH EDITION.

### THE IRONMASTER; OR, LOVE AND PRIDE.

By GEORGES OHNET.

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 146TH FRENCH EDITION.

"This work, the greatest literary success in any language of recent times, has already yielded its author upwards of £12,000."

THIRD EDITION.

### MR. BUTLER'S WARD.

By MABEL ROBINSON.

"A charming book, poetically conceived, and worked out with tenderness and insight."—*Athenæum*.

"The heroine is a very happy conception, a beautiful creation whose affecting history is treated with much delicacy, sympathy, and command of all that is touching."—*Illustrated News*.

"All the characters are new to fiction, and the author is to be congratulated on having made so full and original a haul out of the supposed to be exhausted waters of modern society. A writer who can at the outset write such admirable sense and transform the results of much minute observation into so pathetic and tender a whole, takes at once a high position."—*Graphic*.

SECOND EDITION.

### THE CORSARS; OR, LOVE AND LUCRE.

By JOHN HILL.

AUTHOR OF "THE WATERS OF MARAH," "SALLY," &c.

"It is indubitable that Mr. Hill has produced a strong and lively novel, full of story, character, situations, murder, gold-mines, excursions, and alarms. The book is so rich in promise that we hope to receive some day from Mr. Hill a romance which will win every vote."—*Saturday Review*.

THIRD EDITION.

### COUNTESS SARAH.

By GEORGES OHNET.

AUTHOR OF "THE IRONMASTER."

TRANSLATED, WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT, FROM THE 118TH FRENCH EDITION.

"The book contains some very powerful situations and first-rate character studies."—*Whitehall Review*.

"To an interesting plot is added a number of strongly-marked and cleverly drawn characters."—*Society*.

THIRD EDITION.

### NUMA ROUMESTAN; OR, JOY ABROAD AND GRIEF AT HOME.

By ALPHONSE DAUDET.

TRANSLATED BY MRS. J. G. LAYARD.

"'Numa Roumestan' is a masterpiece; it is really a perfect work; it has no fault, no weakness. It is a compact and harmonious whole."—MR. HENRY JAMES.

"'Numa Roumestan' is a triumph for the art of literary seduction."—*Spectator*.

WORKS BY E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

*Two Vols. large Post 8vo, attractively bound.*

## UNDER THE LENS:

SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHS.

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

ILLUSTRATED WITH 300 ENGRAVINGS.

"Unvarnished portraits of various characters who have made a flutter in recent times in this little world of ours."—*Vanity Fair*.

"Extremely personal. The author, brilliant as were his parts, appears to have laboured under a delusion which obliged him to mistake personal abuse for satire, and ill-nature for moral indignation."—*Athenæum*.

"A gallery of contemporary portraits, limned as audaciously, as unsparingly, and with as much ability as their forerunners in the *Queen's Messenger*."—*World*.

*In Large Post 8vo, cloth gilt, price 10s. 6d.*

## IMPRISONED IN A SPANISH CONVENT:

AN ENGLISH GIRL'S EXPERIENCES.

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

ILLUSTRATED WITH PAGE AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.

*Second Edition, with Frontispiece and Vignette, price 5s.*

## HIGH LIFE IN FRANCE UNDER THE REPUBLIC:

SOCIAL AND SATIRICAL SKETCHES IN PARIS AND THE PROVINCES.

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

AUTHOR OF "SIDE LIGHTS ON ENGLISH SOCIETY," &c.

"Take this book as it stands, with the limitations imposed upon its author by circumstances, and it will be found very enjoyable. . . . The volume is studded with shrewd observations on French life at the present day."—*Spectator*.

"A very clever and entertaining series of social and satirical sketches, almost French in their point and vivacity."—*Contemporary Review*.

*Fourth Edition, in Post 8vo, handsomely bound, price 7s. 6d.*

## SIDE-LIGHTS ON ENGLISH SOCIETY:

Sketches from Life, Social and Satirical.

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

ILLUSTRATED WITH NEARLY 300 CHARACTERISTIC ENGRAVINGS.

"This is a startling book. The volume is expensively and elaborately got up; the writing is bitter, unsparing, and extremely clever."—*Vanity Fair*.

"No one can question the brilliancy of the sketches, nor affirm that 'Side-Lights' is aught but a fascinating book. . . . The book is destined to make a great noise in the world."—*Whitehall Review*.

IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.

# THE GABORIAU & DU BOISGOBEY SENSATIONAL NOVELS,

UNIFORM WITH THE PRESENT VOLUME.

---

THE STANDARD says :—"The romances of Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey picture the marvellous Lecoq and other wonders of shrewdness, who piece together the elaborate details of the most complicated crimes, as Professor Owen, with the smallest bone as a foundation, could re-construct the most extraordinary animals."

---

*The following Volumes are already Published :—*

IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

THE LEROUGE CASE.

LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE. 2 Vols.

THE GILDED CLIQUE.

OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY.

THE SLAVES OF PARIS. 2 Vols.

DOSSIER, No. 113.

THE MYSTERY OF ORCIVAL.

THE COUNT'S MILLIONS. 2 Vols.

THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES.

THE OLD AGE OF LECOQ, THE DETECTIVE. 2 Vols.

INTRIGUES OF A POISONER.

THE CATASTROPHE. 2 Vols.

THE SEVERED HAND.

IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.

THE DAY OF RECKONING. 2 Vols.

BERTHA'S SECRET.

*To be followed by:*

WHO DIED LAST?

THE CRIME OF THE OPERA HOUSE. 2 Vols.

THE THUMB STROKE.

THE MATAPAN AFFAIR.

---

*Other Volumes are in Preparation.*

*DU BOISGOBEY'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.*

II.

# IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.

BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

---

TENTH THOUSAND.

---

LONDON:

*VIZETELLY & Co., 42 CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.*

1885.

GLASGOW:  
DUNN AND WRIGHT,  
PRINTERS.

# IN THE SERPENTS' COILS.



## I.

"YOUR cravat is all awry, father."

"It is quite your own fault, my dear child. You know very well that I have never been able to dress myself without help."

"But you declined my assistance this evening, on the plea that you were in a hurry, and that I should only hinder you."

"Nothing of the kind. You pouted and were sulky, because you did not like the idea of my going to this dinner."

"Why shouldn't I be vexed, I would like to know? I certainly have good cause to be. You are going to leave me here by myself all the evening, and why? Merely to dine in company with some old schoolmates—men you haven't even seen for thirty-five years or more, for you are fifty-three years old."

"Fifty-two, mademoiselle; and I'll thank you not to taunt me with my age. As for the Labadens, as the society giving the banquet is called, I have, no doubt, rather lost sight of its members; but I am still well acquainted with one of them—an intimate friend of one of the ministers, by the way. He will be at the dinner, and, through him, I hope to obtain an order from the Government."

"For the statue of the Volunteer of '92, I suppose? How I hate it! I have only seen you at meal times since you began it, and now you are leaving me to attend a public dinner on account of it. What do you care for a Government commission, now that you are rich?"

"Hum! *You* have an income of sixty thousand francs inherited from your aunt at Rouen, but it doesn't belong to me. I take charge of it, because you are still a minor, but I hate the bother of it, and as soon as you become of age—that is, in two years from now—I shall hand it over to you, unless you marry in the meantime, and in that case it will pass into your husband's charge."

"So you wish me to marry?"

"I certainly don't care that you should die an old maid. The idea of losing you is not a pleasant one, but you cannot live single until the end of my days, for I intend to live to a good old age, I assure you."

Lose me! why I haven't the slightest intention of ever leaving you. I shall make a bargain with the man who proposes to me, and he will have to consent to my conditions. We shall live here with you. This house is quite large enough for three or even four persons. We will let you have the lower floor, so that you can be near your studio, my husband and I will take the second storey, and Cousin Brigitte can climb to the third. She will have a fine view up there."

"Well, well, how fast you go on! While you are about it, you had better decide on the furniture and the colour of the curtains. You girls are wonderful creatures, there is no doubt of it. One would think, to hear you, that you had a husband picked out already."

The father was standing in front of the looking-glass engaged in fruitless efforts to adjust the knot of his white cravat. The daughter, seated in front of the hearth, was poking the fire energetically. She was a very lovely young girl—fresh as a rose, slender and graceful as a reed, and with hair the colour of ripened wheat. Her father did not resemble her in the least, being stout and broad shouldered, with brawny arms, hands made to handle the hammer and chisel, dark eyes shaded by bushy brows, crisply curling hair, and a long flowing beard; a Hercules, to tell the truth, but a gay, good-natured Hercules.

"And what would you say if I had?" asked the girl, somewhat shyly.

"Eh! what is that?" exclaimed the father. "You can't marry without papa's consent, my dear, remember that."

"That is why I speak to you about it."

"You are in earnest, then. And where did you find this husband? In the Parc Monceau, or at the flower market on the Boulevard de Clichy?"

"No, I met him in a drawing-room—at Madame Stenay's."

"Ah, ha! I understand now why you are always running to the house of that old idiot who only thinks of her soirées. You have even tried to drag me there, but I have always refused to set foot in the house."

"You have made a great mistake, you see, as you would have met your future son-in-law."

"My future son-in-law! How quick you are! Come, come, Camille, you must explain yourself a little more clearly. I am no tyrant, and I am very willing that you should marry to suit yourself, but I certainly have a voice in the matter; and, on principle, I distrust the gentlemen who pay attentions to a young lady with a dowry of two hundred thousand francs. Who is this suitor? an artist?"

"Nothing of the kind. He loves the arts and appreciates your talent, but he has never handled a brush or a chisel."

"He appreciates my talent! Get out of my sight, you little flatterer! I expect, if the truth were known, that he has never seen a single work of mine. What does he do?"

"He intended to enter the diplomatic service, but has abandoned the idea. He has an income of twenty thousand francs, and he lives upon it, while pursuing his historical studies. He spends his days in the public libraries, and his evenings in society. He is thirty years old, very handsome and agreeable, and he loves me."

"In short, he is perfection."

"No; he has one fault. He is a count."

"A count! you want to marry a count, you, the daughter of Tiburce Gerfaut, whose father was a stone-cutter! Have you told your lover that you are a stone-cutter's grand-daughter, and that I began life as a labourer?"

"Yes; and he thinks you will do him an honour by accepting him as a son-in-law."

"He is certainly a very liberal-minded nobleman. What is the name of this phoenix?"

"Philippe de Charny."

"A real stage name. I shall never get used to calling you Madame de Charny."

"You will call me Camille after my marriage just as you do now, and you will be so pleased to know that I am happy that you will forgive me for not having consulted you before engaging myself."

"What, you are engaged?"

"Yes. It is all your own fault. You won't accompany me into society; you prefer to dine at the Grand Hôtel, in the company of persons you care nothing about, and with the bow of your cravat under your left ear," said Camille, laughing heartily.

"What else can you expect? I am not a Count de Charny. He, no doubt, understands the art of tying his cravat to perfection. But you had better stop singing his praises, and help me with this confounded tie. I can do nothing with it."

Camille sprang up, hastened to her father, and, standing on tiptoe, caught hold of both ends of the muslin cravat, pulling them so tightly that Gerfaut found it impossible to move his head. "Now, kiss me," said she, raising her forehead.

"If that's all you need to content you, it is done."

"I want one thing more. You must promise me to see Philippe on the day after to-morrow, when he comes to make a formal request for my hand."

"She calls him Philippe on very short acquaintance," sighed Gerfaut, rolling up his eyes. "My poor child, have you no idea whatever of the proprieties?"

"This is not a question of the proprieties, but of my happiness. Promise me that you will see Monsieur de Charny, or I shall let you go to the Labadens' banquet with a cravat tied like a porter's."

"Well, I will see him, but I pledge myself no further. I shall examine and study him, and if I find him a mere swell or 'masher,' I shan't hesitate to show him the door."

"But if you discover that he is a worthy, kind-hearted fellow, what then?"

"Then we will see. He is a count, and I don't fancy counts, as a rule. Still, it is not his fault, after all."

"My cause is won, and your cravat shall be tied in the latest style. Never have the Labadens beheld such an artistic bow as this will be. Look at yourself in the glass now."

"I am superb. It is a pity that my beard partially conceals your handiwork."

"You ought to have your beard trimmed. You look like the statue of the Rhone, near the fountain in the garden of the Tuileries."

"I presume that your Philippe only wears a moustache."

"A moustache as soft as silk. You will have an opportunity of admiring it on the day after to-morrow. But I will have compassion on you, and not detain you any longer. It would be a pity to keep the Labadens waiting."

"I am going. Has Rose fetched a cab?"

"It is at the door. At what time will you be back?"

"I can't say exactly. There will be toasts and singing, I suppose, and the banquet will probably not end before midnight. You won't think of sitting up for me, I hope?"

"Not if you will promise to be careful."

"What do you mean by that, little one?"

"You know very well that a single glass of wine upsets you, so beware of the toasts, and, above all, take a cab home. The papers talk of nothing but attacks upon belated pedestrians, and I am never easy when you are out late at night."

"Oh, I have good fists, and I know how to use them. Come, my child, give me one more kiss and let me go."

Camille kissed her father tenderly on both cheeks, helped him to put on his overcoat, and accompanied him to the foot of the stairs. His last words were: "You will see me to-morrow morning;" to which she might have rejoined: "God willing"—"*In chā Allah*," as the Mussulman always says, remembering that nothing is certain in this world.

The cab was waiting at the door, and Gerfaut got in, promising the driver a handsome gratuity if he made haste. It is no great distance from the Boulevard des Batignolles, where the sculptor resided, to the Grand Hôtel, where the banquet was to take place, and Gerfaut did not find the drive a tedious one, for his daughter's unexpected announcement had furnished him with abundant food for reflection. He adored this spoiled child of his, and had only lived for her since the death of his wife, whom he had lost after ten years of happy married life. Tiburce Gerfaut was the son of the foreman in a stone quarry, who had toiled early and late to give him a college education; but his youth had been a stormy and disappointing one, for if he was endowed with a real talent for sculpture he had a no less pronounced taste for so-called Bohemian life. After unsuccessfully competing for the prize of Rome, he had led a life of abject poverty, sleeping in garrets and living on crusts and broken victuals, obtained on credit at some third-class restaurant; not that he lacked talent, but sculpture is an ungrateful mistress who repays her votaries but poorly, especially in the beginning. The young fellow was working in a marble-yard when he met a girl as poor, but much more sensible than himself, an orphan who earned her living by giving lessons on the piano. They fell in love at first sight, and courageously married, without having any idea how they should manage to keep the pot boiling. But the young pianist brought a practical mind and unfailing courage as her dowry. She soon succeeded in converting Tiburce to more sensible ideas, and cured him of the foolish notion of not condescending to produce popular works under the pretext that it would be a desecration of his art. To provide for his wife, and the lovely child who was born to him at the end of a year, Gerfaut began to execute statuettes that sold very well; and to model in clay the stolid faces of the wealthy tradesfolk, whom he had formerly railed against. They soon began to live in comparative comfort, but not in luxury. There were still times when they found themselves in need, and by the time little Camille was nine years old she was fairly acquainted with the way to the pawnshop, where she had more than once accompanied her mother. At last, just as the prosperity of the household seemed assured, and the young couple were beginning to feel perfectly happy, an event occurred which wrought a great change in their life. The wife had a rich, unmarried aunt who had accumulated a fortune in business at Rouen. This aunt, who would not have lent her niece a farthing when she was struggling to obtain an education, but who had been a little more gracious since her marriage, suddenly died without having time to disinherit her. Thus a large fortune came to Madame Gerfaut, but joy killed her. Three weeks after she had come into possession of the property, she

was carried off by a nervous fever, to the great sorrow of her husband and her daughter.

Gerfaut purchased a house, and sent for a distant relative, duly qualified as a teacher, to whom he entrusted the education of Camille. At the same time, freed from the necessity of toiling for his daily bread, he was able to devote himself to a higher sphere of art, and reveal his real talent to brother-artists and the public. Liberal commissions speedily followed fame, and he made a great deal of money now that there was no longer any need of making it. He soon became accustomed to his change of fortune, but he could not make up his mind to go into society. Still he did not wish to deprive Camille of a pleasure she greatly enjoyed, so he sent her out under the care of Cousin Brigitte, who was well fitted to act as a young girl's chaperon. Invitations were not wanting, for the ex-Bohemian now possessed a name and a large circle of acquaintances. He had even modelled a bust of Madame Stenay who gave such delightful receptions, and entertained so many titled gentlemen.

However, Camille's unexpected revelation now burst upon him like a thunderbolt; followed, as it was, by an announcement of the visit of a suitor whom she had accepted without consulting any one. Gerfaut was not prepared for such news. He had often said to himself that his daughter must marry some day or another, but he had never seriously thought of finding her a husband, and in his secret heart he wished to postpone the evil day as long as possible. So he was not at all pleased to hear that Camille's choice was made, nor was he at all pleased with the choice itself. He was quite satisfied that this Count de Charny would not suit him at all, although, as yet, he had never seen him. He pictured him as very proud of his title, pretentious and arrogant in manner, and an idler. Gerfaut would rather have chosen a modest worker for his son-in-law—some artist who had succeeded, or would succeed, by merit alone. Still, he was not the man to hinder Camille from marrying to suit herself, as her mother had done before her; for he knew by experience that love-matches often turn out much better than the unions which are arranged by the relatives of the interested parties.

What was the wisest course to pursue under these rather embarrassing circumstances? Gerfaut asked himself this question more than once as the cab rolled swiftly through the streets, but he had not answered it to his satisfaction when he alighted in front of the Grand Hôtel. He was the last to arrive, the other guests having already assembled in the hall reserved for the college banquet. There were about sixty people of different ages—men of the world, evidently quite at home in evening dress; worthy fellows uncomfortably conscious of their bran-new coats; young fellows fresh from college; graduates of the preceding year, and not a few greybeards, drawn to the gathering by a desire to renew the memories of their boyhood. The banquet took place every year in the month of February, but Gerfaut had never before attended it. In former years he had not had the money to spare, and since he had become rich he had contented himself with sending his yearly subscription as a member of the society. It was quite owing to chance that he deviated on this occasion from his usual habits. A week or two previously he had met a former schoolmate, who had made him promise to attend the coming banquet, by letting him understand that he might be of service to him with those of high official position. Now, in his secret heart Gerfaut was weak enough to long for a decoration—for one of those strips of red ribbon which pro-

claim that the wearer is a Knight of the Legion of Honour. None of us are perfect, let it be remembered. However, Gerfaut had now arrived at the Grand Hôtel, and, to his great disappointment, he found that his benevolent protector was not present; moreover, all the guests were unknown to him. Years scatter college mates and change countenances to such an extent that old chums often fail to recognise each other. Gerfaut felt lonely and very much out of place; and, though he inscribed his name on the list of guests, he resolved to make his escape before it was time to take one's seat at table. He felt no desire to dine with strangers, infinitely preferring to return home and give Camille an agreeable surprise; and so he was already manœuvring to reach the door, when he was accosted by a young fellow whom he did not recollect having previously seen, but who said to him, with a pleasant smile, "Have I not the honour of speaking to Monsieur Gerfaut?"

"Yes, but——"

"My father was in the same class with you at college, sir, and he has often spoken to me about you. You have not forgotten Jean Brunier, perhaps?"

"No, certainly not. He and I were inseparable. How is he, and why is he not here?"

"I had the misfortune to lose him about three years ago."

"Ah, excuse me for inquiring for him in a tone which must have greatly shocked you. It never occurred to me for a moment that he could have died so young. I was his senior by nearly a year. Poor Brunier! Such a pleasant, good-hearted, sensible, healthy fellow as he was! I should have wagered almost any amount that he would have lived longer than any of us. However, I am very happy to meet his son, and I hope we shall have the pleasure of dining side by side."

"I was about to propose it, sir. I just noticed your name on the register, and approached you in the hope that you would allow me to take a seat beside you. We can take our places now."

With the exception of a score of seats which had been reserved at the upper end of the table for some important officials and college dignitaries, the guests were at liberty to place themselves as they chose, and Gerfaut was not sorry to have some one to talk to during this dinner, which threatened to be a long one. He and young M. Brunier happened to seat themselves between two parties with whom they were not acquainted, and who were conversing among themselves. This rather isolated our friends, who saw that they could be able to talk together without fear of interruption. Young M. Brunier thereupon opened the conversation by a question for which Gerfaut was wholly unprepared, though it was commonplace enough. "May I venture to inquire how your daughter is?" the young fellow asked, rather timidly.

Gerfaut gave a start of surprise.

"My daughter is very well," he replied, "but will you allow me to inquire how you know that I have a daughter?"

"I have had the honour of meeting her several times at Madame Stenay's musical evenings," replied the young man, somewhat abashed.

"I might have known it! That woman entertains all Paris; and Camille never misses one of her receptions. They have no attraction for me. I hate German music; but my daughter goes into raptures over it."

"That explains why I have never met you at Madame Stenay's. I have often felt a strong desire to introduce myself to Mademoiselle Gerfaut, and

tell her that I was the son of one of your former schoolmates, but I was afraid of being considered intrusive."

"By no means. I will introduce you to her myself. Come and see me, my dear fellow. I am at my studio all day."

"I shall be very glad to take advantage of your kind permission, sir; but I am only at leisure on Sundays, as I am employed in a banking house."

"Then come on Sunday, or in the evening, as you prefer. You are not married, I suppose?"

"No, sir, but I have a sister younger than myself, and I seldom leave her alone of an evening."

"Then bring your sister with you," exclaimed Gerfaut, who had just emptied a glass of old Madeira. "Camille has no friends of her own age, and she will be very glad to make your sister's acquaintance."

"My sister would be very glad to accept the invitation, but I do not know whether she can do so or not. She works very hard, and——"

"She works! At what, pray?"

"She makes artificial flowers. I am not ashamed to admit it. Our father, after being connected for twenty-five years with the custom-house service, died without leaving any fortune, and we have had some difficulty in getting along. But I hope that the day when I shall be able to provide handsomely for my sister is not far off. I write for the stage in my leisure moments, and if I succeeded in getting one of my plays accepted——"

"I will assist you in that, my dear Brunier. I am well acquainted with several managers, and I should be very glad to be of service to you. Your story is very like mine. I was as poor as Job when I married my wife, who was without a penny herself; and yet I am rich now. It is true, however, that my good fortune was due to an unexpected legacy. You will owe yours to your own talent and industry, and that will be better still. And yet you may hope to make a wealthy marriage. You have all the requisites, it seems to me."

Gerfaut was perfectly sincere, for the longer he scrutinised the features of this young man the better he liked him. Marcel Brunier was a tall, handsome fellow, some twenty-five years of age, well built and muscular, with brown hair and skin, eyes at once spirited and gentle in their expression, magnificent teeth, and a countenance indicative of intelligence and great kindness of heart. Gerfaut reflected, flattering himself a little.

"He is the very image of what I was at his age. How sorry I am that Camille did not take a fancy to him instead of falling in love with that young coxcomb! Brunier isn't a nobleman, but he will make his way in the world; and I should like to have a son-in-law of his stamp. Well, well, we'll see. Camille isn't a countess yet; and if this Charny doesn't suit my ideas I shall issue a most decided veto. In the meantime my evening isn't wasted after all. I have a very agreeable neighbour, and the dinner is excellent, particularly the wine, and they are not stingy with it."

"I don't allow myself to think of marriage yet," replied Marcel, modestly. And as if he wished to put an end to Gerfaut's rather premature offers of assistance, he turned the conversation upon the fine arts in general, and the art of sculpture in particular. This was attacking the sculptor at his weak point. From his youth he had been inclined to hold forth eloquently upon all æsthetical questions, and since he had given up frequenting taverns and restaurants he was not often fortunate enough to find patient listeners. Consequently he took good care not to miss this

opportunity to expound his theories on the subject of high art. Michael Angelo was his god, and Michael Angelo made him entirely forget all Camille's wise advice. He partook of all the wines that were offered to him, and drank so freely that he was really intoxicated even before the champagne made its appearance, although his condition so far only revealed itself in a copious flow of words which considerably astonished his young friend. But the old sculptor was as substantial as a Roman bridge, and held out to the end. He drank all the toasts conscientiously, drinking to the health of all the past, present, and future pupils of the Collège Labadens, until, when he left the table, everything whirled around him. The *liqueurs* and the compliments finished the work, for people were beginning to find out who he was, and he was praised and flattered to his heart's content. In the result, when the party broke up, some time after midnight, Gerfaut's senses had nearly or quite deserted him. "Where do you live, my boy?" he said to Marcel Brunier, familiarly taking his arm. "I am going to see you safe home."

"I reside a long distance from here," replied Marcel, "in the Rue Labat, between Montmartre and La Chapelle. Rents are so high in the central part of Paris. But it is I, on the contrary, who ought to see you safely home, if you will kindly permit it."

"No, no, nothing of the kind. We are going to take a cab, and I will not have you put to any expense. If you object I shall be very angry. You certainly owe your father's old friend obedience."

Marcel dared not reply, for fear of offending Gerfaut's vanity as a drinker; besides, he thought his companion more sober than he really was. So he said to himself that the old sculptor would surely reach the Boulevard des Batignolles safely; and, having assisted him into a cab, he took a seat beside him. Intoxication brings out into bold relief the virtues as well as the failings of mankind, and Camille's father was the most affectionate of men. On reaching the Rue Labat he shook hands with Marcel as cordially as if he had known him for twenty years, and parted from him with genuine regret.

When he found himself alone, a sudden desire to return home on foot seized hold of him, and he paid the driver and sent him away. "A walk in the open air will do me good," he mused to himself, "and if I take a short cut I shall reach home almost as soon. Besides, Camille has been asleep a long time already, and she won't know at what time I get home."

Re-assured by this thought, Gerfaut started off. He had only to walk down the Rue de Clignancourt to reach the Boulevard Rochechouart, which would have taken him straight home; but that route was too easy. Men in his condition almost invariably seek difficulties in order to convince themselves that they are able to overcome them. He therefore preferred to proceed in a diagonal direction towards the Place Moncey, where the Boulevard des Batignolles begins; but he forgot the natural effect of the cold night air upon a person whose system is impregnated with alcohol, and he also forgot the height of Montmartre, around which nearly all the neighbouring streets are intertwined. Moreover, instead of turning to the left he turned to the right, then he took one of the deserted streets leading to the left, and at the end of about twenty minutes he found that he had lost his way completely. He attempted to get out of his predicament by ascertaining the points of the compass, but the sky was overcast, and the north star invisible, while the inscriptions at the corners of the streets were quite illegible to him. He retraced his steps

a short distance, but soon he became even more bewildered than before. He might easily have asked his way of the occasional pedestrians he encountered, but he obstinately resolved to overcome the difficulty unaided. He crossed several small squares, climbed several steep streets, descended flights of steps, but the further he walked on the more completely he lost all idea of his whereabouts, and he finally butted his head against a stone wall in what seemed to be a blind alley.

He swore lustily at this fresh disappointment; but he resolved to retrace his steps once more, when, on turning, he fancied he discerned a human form through the darkness. He was not quite sure of it, however, as the nearest street lamp was more than thirty yards from the wall against which he had just come into such violent collision. Nevertheless, he hastened towards the shadowy form he fancied he discerned, calling out loudly: "Here, sir, one word, I beg."

The man, for it was a man, at first stopped short, and then seemed inclined to beat a retreat.

"Don't be afraid," continued Gerfaut. "I am not after your money or your life. I only want to ask my way."

The man began to approach, but he moved slowly, as if rather dreading a meeting in this lonely spot. "You must know very well where you are," he replied, when he had come a little nearer.

"No, upon my word I don't. I suspect that I am at Montmartre; but may the devil take me if I know which way to turn to reach my destination on the Boulevard des Batignolles."

"You are not a Parisian, then."

"Yes, I am, and I know Montmartre as well as I know my own house."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Well, I have been dining out, and, to tell the truth, I suppose I must have taken a little too much liquor. Unfortunately, I did not discover the fact until it was too late, for I dismissed my cab, and ever since then I have been wandering about like a lost dog. I came very near butting my brains out against the wall over there just now. It seems to me that I am in a labyrinth, and I shall never get out of it. So pray help me, for I begin to think I shall never succeed in finding my way home alone."

"If I was sure that what you say is true——"

"So you still believe that I have evil designs on you? How can I convince you that I have drunk too much. I walk tolerably straight, it's true, but it seems to me that everything is whirling around before me. What I ask of you is to help me to find a cab. I can then give the number of my house to the driver, and he will take me there."

"I should be glad to oblige you, but I haven't time."

"Oh. I'll pay you well for your trouble," said Gerfaut, fumbling about in his pocket.

He had just noticed for the first time that the man was dressed in a blouse, with a slouched hat lowered over his eyes. The rest of his face was nearly hidden by a heavy, unkempt beard. He had not the usual harsh, nasal voice of a Parisian loafer, but his garb did not indicate wealth by any means, and the promise of a liberal reward would probably induce him to render such a trifling service. "Oh, if I could help you out of your trouble I would do it for nothing," he replied, rather more graciously; "but I am in a still worse fix myself, and I am looking for some one to help me."

"Help you in what?"

"In carrying my wife to the hospital."

"What is the matter with your wife?"

"She has been suddenly taken ill, and there is no one to nurse her in the hovel where we live. Although I am very poor I should have gone out in search of a physician, but before finding one my poor wife might die. She became unconscious a few moments ago, and all I was able to do was to place her on a litter; but I can't carry it alone, so I'm going to the nearest station-house to see if I can find some good-natured policeman who will lend me a helping hand. I am very sorry to refuse you, but as you can easily understand——"

"I understand, of course. You certainly can't be expected to leave your wife merely to show me my way home. But there is a way to arrange all this. What hospital do you intend to take her to?"

"They will take her in anywhere. She needs no card of admission in her present state. But I shall take her to the nearest hospital, of course, to Lariboisière."

"Well, I will help you to carry her, and afterwards I shall have no difficulty in finding a cab, as we shall be near the Northern Railway Station, where there are always plenty of cabs waiting."

"Thank you; but you might drop the litter on the way."

"Nonsense! it can't be very heavy, especially to the owner of muscles like mine."

"I don't doubt your strength; but you can't walk straight."

"You are very much mistaken, as you'll see. Where is your wife?"

"Over there in the alley just round the corner. I had no difficulty in getting her as far as that, as she was downstairs when she was taken ill."

"Come, then, she must be getting impatient."

"No, for she's unconscious, as I told you before. But I accept your offer all the same; and if I can be of any service to you when I have got her safe in the hospital, I won't refuse."

"Very well. Lead the way."

The man turned and retraced his steps, keeping close to the wall which here described the right angle against which Gerfaut had collided. The wall must have enclosed some gardens, for the rustling of dry leaves was distinctly audible as the wind swayed the tree-tops to and fro. A little further on, at the corner of an alley, stood a house, the windows of which were closed, and the door open—a narrow door, scarcely wide enough to admit two persons abreast. The man stepped in, but almost instantly emerged, dragging a litter exactly like those which are habitually used in Paris in the carriage of the sick or wounded. It was provided with legs and handles, so that the bearers could set it down occasionally and rest. It was also covered with a canopy of heavy striped linen, to protect its occupant from inclement weather and curious eyes. "I will go ahead, as you don't know the way," remarked the man. "Take hold of the two handles behind, and wait until I say ready."

"Hadn't you better look and see how your wife is?" inquired Gerfaut, a little surprised at the husband's expeditious method of disposing of his spouse.

"No, I know all about these attacks; and I can't do anything for her. She has had them before. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Don't be afraid. I won't let her fall."

"Lift, then. There, that's all right. Now let us start."

Gerfaut obeyed orders. He was delighted to have an opportunity to

show his strength and render a service. The sick woman was not heavy; besides, as he had foreseen, the very act of carrying a litter steadies the bearer of it, by obliging him to walk with his legs somewhat apart, like a sailor on the deck of a vessel. The leader of the expedition walked on with an even, firm, and unhesitating step through the labyrinth of silent, deserted streets. The neighbourhood was evidently familiar to him; but although Gerfaut watched with all his eyes, he could not understand their course. It seemed to him that they were always in the same narrow thoroughfare, bordered by the same dingy old buildings. They apparently passed through street after street, but Gerfaut saw no public square, fountain, nor church that would serve as a guide to him, and he finally began to have his suspicions that they were walking round and round the same cluster of houses. Once he even fancied that he recognised over a shop-door a sign which he had noticed only a few moments before. "Where are we now, my good fellow?" he cried to his guide. "We must have been a long way from the boulevard."

"Yes, a very long way; and we are still some distance from it; but if you are tired, we can rest a moment."

"To tell the truth, I shouldn't mind stopping to take breath, nor, indeed, to wait for some one who would lend a hand."

"I think I hear the police coming. Listen!" replied his companion.

A sound of measured footsteps fell upon Gerfaut's ears. It came from a distance, apparently from some way down an adjacent street, but it was evidently coming nearer. "Let us set the litter down," continued the man. "Now, you had better remain here on guard, while I go to meet the policemen who are coming up the hill. They won't refuse to help us, and they will also get you a cab."

"That's a good idea, my friend. I will wait for you here, of course; and if your wife regains consciousness, I will tell her that you will soon be back."

"There's no likelihood of that; she generally remains in this state for several hours," said the husband, as he hurried away. As Gerfaut stood watching, it seemed to him that the man, instead of turning into the street which the policemen were ascending, passed it, quickening his pace; but he was by no means sure of the point, as the night was so dark; moreover, the idea of finding himself under the protection of trustworthy guides was too pleasant to be lightly abandoned.

"It will be much better than remaining harnessed to a litter," he said to himself. "If Camille saw me in my present plight, how she would laugh! But it is strange that this woman neither moves nor groans. I have half a mind to lift one of the curtains and see if she hasn't died on the way. She has given no sign of life since I have had hold of the litter. The husband says, however, she is subject to such attacks, and of course he ought to know." To tell the truth, Gerfaut was not very favourably impressed with the man, whom he had only consented to help because he thought he could at the same time get out of his own unpleasant dilemma; so he changed his mind, just as he was on the point of lifting a corner of the curtain, and decided to wait for the arrival of the policemen his companion had gone to fetch. "The poor woman will perish of cold," he muttered, as he leaned against a wall, partly to rest himself, and partly because he was not yet very sure of his equilibrium. "If she revives, she will probably call out, and in that case I must try to console her until her tender spouse returns. Nevertheless, I should much prefer being at

home. I am half frozen here, and it seems to me at times that the houses are dancing a jig. How I wish I was snug and warm in bed! Well, well, I can't say that I am very proud of my evening's performance. It is more than twenty-five years since such a thing happened to me. Heaven grant that I shall find Camille still in bed when I get home! I shall be all right to-morrow, but if I appeared before her in my present condition I should dangerously compromise my paternal authority, and I need all my authority and influence to prevent my dear child from making a very foolish marriage. The devil take all the Labadens! No, not all of them. That Marcel Brunier seems to be a very nice sort of a fellow, and I was very lucky to meet him. Hum! he must have a nice opinion of me. He probably takes me for an old drunkard. But, nonsense; once isn't always, and these accidents may happen to any one."

While Gerfaut was thus thinking aloud, as is not unusual with intoxicated persons, minute followed minute, and he finally became conscious of the flight of time. "What can that fool be about?" he suddenly exclaimed. "He has had time to go and return two or three times already. Has he played me such a trick as to decamp? I should find myself in a pretty predicament here, with his sick wife on my hands. But I am not obliged to stay here, after all. Yes, I am; for I don't know where we are, and I can't find my way home alone." He listened, and heard footsteps slowly approaching. "Here the fool comes at last," he resumed, "and he is bringing the policemen with him. They are taking their time about it, though; they seem to be advancing about as rapidly as snails. They are not very anxious to relieve me, probably. I can easily understand that, but they may as well make up their minds to it. Ah! here they are."

Two men in uniform had just appeared in sight, some twenty yards from the spot where Gerfaut was standing, and seemed to be in doubt as to what course they should pursue, for they abruptly came to a standstill. Perhaps they also felt the need of stopping to take breath after climbing such a steep hill. "Why, there are only two of them," muttered the sculptor. "Where is the husband? I can't say that I much care what has become of him, as he has sent these men here, and as they don't seem to know exactly where to find the woman, I will go and tell them."

Suiting the action to the word, he advanced towards the policemen, though not without reeling a little. They stood and looked at him, but did not move. "Come this way," he called, gesticulating violently.

"What for, I should like to know?" growled one of the policemen—an old trooper, who was evidently not inclined to listen to any nonsense. "What is the matter with that lunatic? Does he imagine that we are under his orders?"

"He is only a little intoxicated. I don't fancy he means any harm," replied his companion, who was younger and not so surly.

"I don't suppose he does; but for all that he had better behave himself, or I shall take him to the station-house."

Gerfaut was still too far off to overhear this dialogue, and he was not at all prepared for the reception that awaited him; so he continued, vehemently—"Come this way, I say. The litter is here, near the lamp. Make haste!"

"It isn't a drunkard, but a lunatic," muttered the old policeman.

"What have you done with the man?" continued Gerfaut, as he reached the two members of the force.

"You had better have done with your nonsense, unless you want to spend the rest of the night in the station-house," replied the younger policeman.

"In the station-house! That was all very well when I was a student; but I have settled down since then. Do I look like the sort of man you put in the station-house?"

"You needn't take the trouble to explain. What do you want?"

"I want you to assist me in taking a sick woman to the hospital."

"You must be trying to play a joke on us."

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you. She is very ill; in fact, I should not be at all surprised if she were dead by this time."

"Who is she? Your wife?"

"No; the wife of a man whom I met in the street a little while ago and who asked me to lend him a helping hand."

"If there are two of you, you don't need our assistance."

"But he has left me. We heard you coming, and he said he would go and ask you to help us. I wasn't sorry of a chance to rest, as I had had quite enough of playing the porter; so we set the litter down, and he started off on the run. I can't understand how you failed to see him."

"We have seen no one."

"He must have made a mistake in the street, then, and in that case, he is now looking for you somewhere else."

"It is much more likely that he has played a trick on you, and I shouldn't advise you to wait for him, unless you care to remain here until the morning."

"I begin to think that he has decamped. But I don't see what he could possibly gain by playing such a trick on me."

"Nor do I," replied the policeman, who evidently did not know what to make of the affair.

"But this is no business of ours; though my advice to you, old gentleman, is to go home to bed as quickly as you can."

"That sounds easy enough; but where am I now?"

"What! don't you know where you are? That's a good joke."

"No, I don't know. I'm not joking, upon my word of honour I'm not. You see, I have drunk a little too much——"

"You needn't take the trouble to tell us. The fact is evident enough."

"Yes; I dined out this evening, and drank rather too much wine, as I said before. After dinner, I went home with a friend who resides in the Rue—upon my word, I have forgotten the name of the street; but it is near the Chaussée Clignancourt—and when I left him I wanted to take a short cut to reach the Boulevard des Batignolles, where I live. But I lost my way, and I had wandered about the streets for nearly an hour, when I met a man who seemed to pop suddenly out of a wall. I asked him to show me my way home, offering to pay him well for his trouble; but he replied that his wife was very ill, and that he was trying to find some one to help him to carry the litter on which he had placed her. I could not refuse, of course, especially as he promised to show me the way home afterwards, so I consented, and he led me through a number of streets which I know nothing about."

"And when he heard us coming, he took to his heels, I suppose," said the policeman. "I am satisfied that he did it to avoid meeting us. But where is the litter?"

"Over there. You can see it from here."

"Did the woman say anything when her husband ran away?"

"Not a word; and for the best of reasons. She has been unconscious ever since we started with her. She is subject to such attacks, it seems."

"And you believed such a yarn as that! You must be easily imposed upon. Your friend is probably some impecunious tenant who is moving all his household furniture, in order to cheat his landlord out of his rent."

"That's quite possible, upon my word! There was no porter to the house, and the litter was in the alley. Ah, the rascal! If I were sure of it——"

"You can soon see. Come with us."

Gerfaut needed no urging. The mere thought that he had perhaps been so grossly deceived made him furious, and he was eager to learn the truth. The two policemen followed him, the elder of them remarking to the other—"We must keep an eye on this fellow. He may be in league with the man who ran away. The affair looks rather mysterious."

Gerfaut was the first to reach the litter, and, after cautiously untying the strings that fastened the curtains, he gently raised one of them.

"I was sure of it," he exclaimed. "It really is a woman, and a very sick woman, too. She doesn't move any more than if she were dead, and her eyes are tightly closed."

The two policemen leaned over the litter to examine this strange invalid more closely; and suddenly the elder officer ejaculated: "I shouldn't think that she *would* move. She has been strangled. The rope is still round her neck."

"Strangled!" exclaimed Gerfaut. "Then that scoundrel must have done it. I'll run after him and compel him to explain."

He was about to rush off in pursuit of the missing man, quite forgetting that he was in no condition to undertake the task; but the elder policeman caught him by the collar, and harshly exclaimed: "I forbid you to move!" Gerfaut was a powerful man; but he did not attempt to disengage himself. On the contrary, he stood as if paralysed. He was slowly beginning to understand that these officers suspected him of being the accomplice of the man who had just fled.

"Yes; you are right," replied the other officer. "The rope is still about her neck. She has either been strangled, or else she hanged herself."

"And yet you won't let me run after the husband! Don't you see that he must have been the person who committed the crime?"

"You are not going to run after him, you old rascal," said the policeman, still keeping a firm hold on Gerfaut; "on the contrary, you are going with me to the station-house." Then, turning to his comrade, he added: "You, Grain-de-Plomb, had better remain here beside the litter, while I take this gentleman to the sergeant. I will send some one to help you bring the body."

The policeman who answered to the nick-name of Grain-de-Plomb (small shot), but whose real name was Graindorge, had a kind and intelligent face. He had been watching Gerfaut attentively, and seemed to differ from his elder comrade in opinion. "We had better take the body with us now," he said. "This gentleman won't make any attempt to escape. I'm sure of it; and even if he did, he would not get far."

"Make my escape! I haven't the slightest desire to do so," cried Camille's father. "Nothing would please me better than to help you in capturing the scoundrel who murdered this woman, and then tried to im-

plicate me in such a shameful crime. Let us go to the station-house at once, and summon a commissary of police. I will tell him what occurred, and we will then try to find the house from which this villain started."

"The gentleman is right," remarked Graindorge. "It is the only way to discover the perpetrator of the crime, and we have no time to lose. Take hold of the litter in front, Colache. I will take hold behind, and this gentleman can walk along beside me."

"It would be safer to handcuff him, I think," growled Colache, who was always in favour of rigorous measures.

"I should advise you not to attempt it," replied Gerfaut. "I am very willing to go with you, but I warn you that you mustn't attempt to use force, so you had better let go of me at once." As he spoke, he freed himself with a single movement of his brawny shoulders, and, holding up both his strong hands, he remarked: "Don't you see that it would be a very easy matter for me to knock you both down?"

Colache yielded, though not without a growling protest, for Graindorge had just said to him in a low tone: "He will furnish us with a clue to the mystery, and he seems to me to be a very respectable man. I think it would be much better to use persuasive measures."

"Very well; let us start then," said Colache, and he added to Gerfaut: "Keep to the right of me, and don't try to run. If you do, I'll shoot you, sure."

The sculptor did not condescend to reply to this insult, knowing, as he did, that he would soon be in the presence of officials capable of understanding his explanation. The party formed in the order indicated, and, after ascending a steep hill, they turned to the right. Gerfaut obeyed instructions by remaining within Colache's reach. In fact, he never even thought of taking flight. His still bewildered brain was busily trying to solve the mystery that enveloped this strange affair, though every now and then he thought of Camille, who was, perhaps, anxiously awaiting his return; for he knew her, and did not implicitly rely upon the promise she had made to retire at an early hour. "How astonished she will be when she hears my story!" he said to himself. "She loves tragedies, and this will interest her greatly. But I shall get scolded all the same, and, to tell the truth, I richly deserve it. I shall be subjected to countless annoyances for two or three days; there is no question about that. It will be necessary to see a commissary of police, and perhaps also an investigating magistrate, for a crime has certainly been committed. There isn't the slightest doubt of it. Had this woman hanged herself, the scoundrel who got me into this scrape would not have taken so much trouble to get rid of the body. And, in the meantime, I shall be unable to work on my statue, and perhaps miss the opening of the Fine Art show—to say nothing of the fact that the magistrates may suspect me of the crime. The policemen suspect me already. I shall have no difficulty in establishing my innocence, of course, but it is always a very disagreeable task. My name will be in all the papers, and all Paris will know that Tiburce Gerfaut, the sculptor of the Volunteer of '92, which will, perhaps, take the first prize this year, has been arrested like a common malefactor. Well, I shall certainly have reason to remember this dinner at the Grand Hôtel."

These and similar reflections occupied Gerfaut's mind until he reached the station-house, which was not far from the spot where the pretended husband had so adroitly managed to make his escape. Several constables had just come in, and an officer of the peace, as the captains of the force

are called, had just returned from a tour of inspection. It was to him that Gerfaut's guards related the particulars of the affair, while the sculptor warmed himself by the stove. The officer ordered the litter to be brought in, and, although the various agents present were accustomed to discoveries of the most revolting character, they were all amazed at the sight now offered to their eyes. The unfortunate woman appeared to be at least forty-five years of age. It was evident that she had once been beautiful, but her emaciated features showed that she had greatly suffered before her death, either from want or ill-health. An old cotton counterpane had been thrown over her, but she was completely dressed in a rusty black woollen gown, an old plaid shawl, and—strange contrast—she wore shabby high-heeled Louis Quinze shoes and lavender silk stockings with holes in several places.

"Luxury and poverty! It is easy to see what kind of a person she must have been," muttered the officer, after a careful scrutiny.

A new rope encircled her neck, with its end hanging down upon her breast. The knot had cut deeply into her flesh. There could be no doubt that she had been hanged, but whether the hanging had been voluntary or compulsory a physician must decide, and just then the officer could only give his attention to facts. He had learned some of the particulars from his subordinates, but their account was necessarily incomplete, as it only went back to the time when Gerfaut first called them, and the explanation which Gerfaut had so far given seemed to him altogether unsatisfactory. "So you say," he remarked, turning to the sculptor, who had also examined the body with the liveliest curiosity—"so you say that you would not recognise the man whom you assisted in carrying this littler. That seems very strange to me."

"I can very readily understand that," replied Gerfaut, quietly. "It does seem incomprehensible, but it is nevertheless true. I had lost my way in a locality I knew nothing about. I had drank a little too much, I frankly admit, and I was wandering about the end of a blind alley when a man wearing a blouse and a felt hat suddenly appeared before me. I cannot describe him to you, for I did not see his face. All I know is, that he had a long beard—a beard almost as long as mine. I asked him my way, and begged him to set me right. He replied that if I would help him to take his wife to the hospital he would afterwards show me my way home."

"And you consented to this arrangement?"

"Any one would have consented to it. You yourself, had you been in my place, would have done exactly what I did. One can't refuse to do everything in one's power to save a dying woman."

"But a man is at least likely to satisfy himself that a human life is really in danger. What! this fellow told you that his wife was so ill, and you were not surprised to find that she neither moved nor uttered a sound?"

"He had remarked that she was unconscious. I admit, however, that I did very wrong to take his word for it, without satisfying myself beyond a doubt that he was telling the truth. But I repeat that my mind was not in its normal condition. I had drank freely at dinner, and though not exactly drunk, I was incapable of reasoning clearly, and so I yielded to a very natural feeling of compassion. Besides, I certainly had not the slightest reason to suspect that the stranger was trying to secure my help for such a purpose."

"It is certainly strange that he should have depended upon your assist-

ance in this matter when he could not have foreseen that you would pass by."

"Oh, it was the merest chance that took me there. Probably that was why he hesitated so long before answering my questions, for it was only after he became aware of my condition that he proposed that I should help him. He evidently intended to leave me in the lurch, as he did."

"But you must have known what to think of him when he left you so unceremoniously?"

"No, upon my word of honour I didn't. We heard your men coming, and I was very tired. He told me—and I really believed him—that he was going to call them to relieve me."

"But when you found that he did not call them, why didn't you call them yourself?"

"I did call them as soon as they came in sight, and I beg you to take note of the fact that I could have decamped as well if I had felt any fear of meeting them. But, on the contrary, I went and called them when I saw that they were likely to pass on without noticing me." This argument seemed to make an impression upon the official, who had hitherto looked somewhat incredulous. "If I may venture to give you a bit of advice," continued Gerfaut, "I should suggest that instead of wasting precious time on these unimportant explanations, we might start out in search of the house from which the litter was taken. I am almost sure that I can find it without much difficulty."

The officer seemed to be favourably impressed by this suggestion, and soon a little party, consisting of himself, the two policemen previously mentioned, and Gerfaut, sallied forth from the station-house in search of the mysterious dwelling. When they had reached the spot where the sculptor had first accosted the policemen, the officer slackened his pace and Gerfaut walked on slowly in advance, subjecting all the houses on both sides of the street to a rigid scrutiny. Unfortunately, they all looked exactly alike, for dingy dwellings alternated with garden walls. However, at about thirty yards from the Rue Houdon, they found an alley, and Gerfaut paused a moment to reflect. "No," he murmured, "I did not come that way. We must go on further."

They did so until they reached a point where the street made a sudden turn. "It is very strange," muttered Gerfaut, "but it seems to me that this must be the wall I struck my head against. Let us go a few steps further—yes, this is certainly the place, and yet I didn't notice these steps at the end of the street. Besides, I carried the litter at least twenty minutes. No, I certainly can't have reached the place from which we started yet."

The officer, who had intentionally remained a short distance behind, now rejoined Gerfaut; and a moment afterwards the two policemen also came up. "I cannot understand it," exclaimed Gerfaut. "This place is wonderfully like the spot where I wandered about before I met the man, and I would almost swear that he took me into the street through which we just passed. Where do those steps lead to?"

"To the square in front of the mayor's office," replied Colache, "and the street behind us leads to the Place Pigalle."

"Then I must be mistaken, for I am sure that I neither ascended or descended any steps. Let us go on a little further."

"It is useless. This street has no outlet except this staircase and the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux-Arts. It is a perfect blind alley."

Gerfaut scratched his head in evident perplexity. "I will go on and reconnoitre," he said, after reflecting for a moment; "and I think I shall succeed better if you will allow me to go alone. So will you be kind enough to wait for me here while I examine each of the houses carefully. You need have no fear that I shall try to escape. I shall not be gone more than three minutes."

It was a very sensible proposal, and the officer acknowledged as much; but before acceding to it he wished to know something more about the man he was in charge of. "Who are you, sir?" he inquired, in a more friendly tone.

"My name is Tiburce Gerfaut. I am a sculptor, and I reside at No. 99 Boulevard des Batignolles."

"What! are you Monsieur Gerfaut, the celebrated sculptor?"

"I don't know that I am celebrated, but I assure you that I am not capable of acting as the accomplice of a criminal. It is very easy for you to ascertain whether I am telling the truth or not. The house in which I have resided for ten years past belongs to me; I am very well known in the neighbourhood, and if you will accompany me home after our search for this scoundrel's domicile is concluded——"

"I believe you, sir, and you must excuse me for having doubted you. It did not occur to me——"

"That the head of a family, a landlord, and artist, would be running about the streets at night in an intoxicated condition. But one is liable to commit acts of folly at any age. I attended an alumni dinner, given at the Grand Hôtel, this evening—see my white cravat—and I got terribly drunk——"

"So drunk that you entirely forgot the way home," said the officer, pointedly. "You are now at Montmartre, and to come from the Boulevard des Capucines, where the Grand Hôtel stands——"

"I must have gone very much out of my way, unquestionably; but I will explain how that happened. On leaving the hôtel I accompanied the son of one of my former classmates to his home in the Rue Labat—I recollect the name now. On parting from him at his door, the unfortunate idea of returning to Batignolles on foot, by the shortest cut, occurred to me. I lost my way, and—well, you know the rest; and I shall be very grateful to you if you will refrain from publishing any account of my mishaps, for if my daughter learns——"

"I will do my best to spare you that annoyance; and I think with you, sir, that the most important point now is to find the house from which the litter was taken. It is useless to try to pursue the man. He is a long way off by this time; but if you could point out the door from which he emerged, that would perhaps be the next best thing to capturing him."

"I don't think I could do that. The door was open, and the litter was in the alley; but I remember that the windows had green blinds, and that the house was only one storey high."

"Very good, but the street?"

"Ah, I can tell you nothing about that."

"Didn't you look at the name on the street-lamp when you turned the corner?"

"No; indeed, I didn't feel the slightest interest in knowing where I was, as the scoundrel had promised to show me my way home. Besides, it would have been of no use for me to look, as I was seeing double at the

time. All I can tell you is, that just as I saw him first I nearly battered my brains out against a stone wall at the end of an alley; that he made me turn to the right into a narrow street; and that the house was the first on the left-hand side."

"This information is exceedingly vague. Do you recollect the streets through which you passed while you were carrying the litter?"

"No; for I followed him wherever he led me, without troubling myself in the least about our course; but we walked a long time, and towards the end I began to have a suspicion that we were all the time going over the same ground."

"That is quite likely. He was trying to bewilder you still more, probably."

"And he succeeded. I ought to have scattered some pebbles in the path, like little Hop-o'-my-Thumb in the fairy tale, but I had none," said Gerfaut gaily, for he was gradually recovering his usual exuberant spirits. "I think the best way would be to make the journey over again, beginning from the point where the policemen first met me; perhaps I shall then be able to recollect our course. So, if you will kindly ask them where that was——"

"Certainly."

"We had just ascended the Rue Houdon," said Graindorge, who had been listening attentively to the conversation; "and when the gentleman called us he was at the corner of an alley on the left-hand side of the street; I must admit that I don't know where the alley led to."

"I think it is connected with the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux-Arts," replied Colache.

"True, that's very near here."

"But I know the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux-Arts, and very well, too," exclaimed Gerfaut. "I passed along it a thousand times while I was working at a studio on the Place Pigalle. That was a long time ago, it's true, and I haven't been there since, but I don't understand how I could have failed to recognise it."

"I am afraid that you won't remember the rest of the way any better; still, we can try."

"I am ready."

In fact, Gerfaut was eager to begin the search, for he was perfectly enraged against the scoundrel who had set the diabolical trap into which he had so foolishly fallen. He was more than willing to devote all the rest of the night to the task, if necessary, nor was he displeased at the thought of the exciting story with which he would be able to entertain his daughter on the morrow. The little party descended the Rue Houdon, the officer walking beside Gerfaut, and closely followed by the two policemen. "Is this the place?" at last inquired the officer, pausing at the corner of an unpromising-looking side street.

"Precisely," replied Gerfaut. "I was under this very street lamp when the rascal left me. Your men were ascending this street. They must have entered it from the Boulevard de Clichy, and the man probably took some other street to avoid meeting them."

"Yes, he may have turned into the Rue des Abbesses. But we will pay no further attention to him just now. Let us explore this side street, or rather alley, and see if this is really the place."

"Very well. It will be better, I think, for me to go on ahead. You have no objections, I suppose?"

The officer's suspicions had vanished, so he consented, to the great annoyance of Colache, who persisted in believing that the gentleman in a white cravat was in league with the fugitive. The further Gerfaut went, the more sure he felt that this was the very place to which the man had brought him. He stepped back a little to examine the front of the first house, and he stood almost spell-bound with astonishment, for here were the closed windows, the green shutters, and the single storey; and as if to increase the resemblance, the door stood open, although the man had taken care to close it before starting off with the litter.

Gerfaut did not wait to call the officer, who had not yet turned the corner of the street. He marched straight to the door, and was about to step into the passage, when a sensation of sharp and blinding pain made him shriek aloud. It seemed to him as if his face had just been seared with a red-hot iron, and almost at the same instant the door was pushed to so violently that he was nearly felled to the ground. He raised his hands to his face and tried to open his eyes, for in his surprise he thought he must have closed them; but everything around him had suddenly become invisible. "Blind! I am blind!" he cried wildly. "Some one has thrown vitriol in my face!"

He uttered this exclamation in his first unreasoning anguish and terror, but he did not yet really credit the catastrophe he was deploring. He really thought that the door, violently closed by an unseen hand, had struck him on the forehead with such force as to stun him. "No," he murmured, trying to re-assure himself, "the door hit me full in the face, and for an instant I saw stars innumerable; now I can see nothing at all; but in a minute or two I shall be all right again."

But this illusion was of short duration. His flesh burned and writhed under the gnawing of the vitriol, and his eyes were still sightless. Who can describe the feelings of a man suddenly deprived of the power of vision? His physical sufferings are nothing in comparison with his mental agony. To suddenly realise that you are condemned to eternal darkness—that you will never again see the faces of those who are dear to you—is it not, indeed, as if you were cut off from the number of the living, and would you not a thousand times rather be killed instantly than thus die by inches? A person who is born blind does not know what he loses. He has never seen the blue heavens nor a beloved face. The senses of hearing, touch, and taste are left him, and he does not regret the sense that is lacking, from the fact that he has never known it. He has pleasures which are peculiarly his own, and it not unfrequently happens that he is remarkably cheerful, even gay, in disposition. But Gerfaut, stricken with blindness at the age of fifty—Gerfaut, the sculptor and father—experienced suffering far more cruel than all the tortures invented by the Inquisition.

"My daughter, my poor daughter!" he cried, lifting his clenched hands despairingly to heaven.

"What is the matter, sir?" inquired the officer, who, being a short distance behind him, did not understand the meaning of the words he had heard.

"They have blinded me by throwing vitriol in my face," replied poor Gerfaut, in a voice hoarse with agony.

"Good heavens! you have, indeed, been burned. Your cheeks and forehead are terribly scarred; and your eyes——"

"My sight is extinguished. It will be night, night for ever with me now."

"Who did it? speak!"

"I saw no one. I recognised the house where the man brought me, and was about to enter it. He was doubtless concealed in the alley, for just as I set foot in it, I experienced a terrible sensation of pain. Involuntarily, I retreated, the door was shut violently in my face——"

"The same door that is here in front of you?"

"I cannot tell. I am blind."

The officer was not an unfeeling man, and he realised that this was no time to question the sculptor respecting the particulars of the crime of which he had been the victim, and that, in such a case as this, the pursuit of justice must give way to compassion. "Sir," he said, deeply and sincerely touched, "I beg your pardon for having forgotten, for an instant, that my first duty is to relieve you. We will return to the station-house and send for a physician. Your case is, perhaps, not hopeless after all."

"A physician cannot restore my sight; I am sure of that. Tell one of your subordinates to take me home, while you remain here to capture the wretch who has thus disabled me. He has not left the house, so break open the door, seize him, and then bring him to me. I may possibly recognise his voice. But do not keep me here any longer, I beg, for I am undergoing martyrdom."

"You bear your sufferings with a courage and fortitude I can only admire, and I will do what you wish, sir. We will get a vehicle for you, and Graindorge shall accompany you home."

"Graindorge is the younger of your two men, is he not?" inquired Gerfaut, who recollected that this man had seemed more kindly disposed than the other when he called them to assist him in carrying the litter.

"Yes, sir; but if you prefer that I should accompany you myself, I can leave my men to guard the house, and return here when I am satisfied that you have received the necessary attention. You are married, probably?"

"I am a widower; but my daughter lives with me."

"It would be advisable, then, to break the news to her as gently as possible."

"Subterfuges will be useless," said Gerfaut, bitterly. "It will be impossible to conceal from her the fact that her father is blind. I prefer to tell her myself, however. Come, sir, I am waiting."

At a sign from his superior officer, Graindorge took the unfortunate sculptor's arm, saying, gently: "Come, you may rely upon me, sir."

But Gerfaut, even in his agony, had the presence of mind to give the officer a bit of valuable information before his departure.

"The house is the one that is only one storey high—the house with green shutters," he said, hurriedly. "The door is a single door, and when the man brought me here to help him to carry the litter, I noticed that there was a brass bell-knob on the left-hand side."

"Thank you, sir. To-morrow, I will do myself the honour of calling and inquiring how you are, and I hope I shall be able to announce the capture of the scoundrel we are seeking."

Gerfaut was already some distance off. He walked with a firm step, leaning on the arm of the kind-hearted Graindorge, who guided him towards the Place Pigalle. The ex-Bohemian, whom fate had afflicted so cruelly after making him the happiest of fathers, displayed, in his adversity, an amount of courage and energy which gained for him not

only the admiration of the officer of the peace, but even the sympathy of Colache, although the latter was by no means tender-hearted.

"What do you think of this affair?" inquired the officer, whose acquaintance with Colache was of long standing.

"I think the gentleman is right, and that the rascal who destroyed his sight is still in the house. I should not even be surprised if he has been listening to us all the time on the other side of the door."

"The deuce ! let us get a little further off."

When they had retreated a few steps the officer continued, in a lower tone : "The commissary of police must have reached the station-house by this time. I will go for him, and bring four men and a sergeant back with me. You, Colache, will remain here, and if the scoundrel comes out you must arrest him. You are strong, and not at all afraid, I suppose."

"Afraid ? Not the least bit in the world ! If he is alone, I'll get him, never fear, and if there should be two of them, I'll use my revolver."

"It is not very likely that there will be two of them ; besides, here are reinforcements coming now."

In fact, another policeman could be seen hastening up from the direction of the boulevard. On his arrival he explained that Graindorge had met him as he was going his round with a comrade, and had sent him to the assistance of his superior officer. His comrade had gone to summon a locksmith. Graindorge had thought of everything, and the officer secretly promised him speedy promotion, as a reward for the valuable aid he had rendered ; for it was certainly far better to obtain admittance by means of a skeleton key than to burst the door open, at the risk of bringing all the neighbours to the windows. The operation, to be successful, must be performed noiselessly, for there are always persons to oppose a public arrest, even when it is the arrest of a criminal ; and, besides, the forcing of a door is always an act of doubtful expediency. The officer changed his plans. He sent the new-comer to warn the commissary, whose presence was indispensable in so grave a case, and, while waiting the arrival of that magistrate, he decided to remain on guard with Colache. There were no signs of life within the house, and all the residents of the unfrequented alley were doubtless asleep, as no lights nor pedestrians were visible.

"It surprises me very much that the scoundrel should have returned to his den," said Colache. "The sculptor pretends that he saw him turn into the Rue Houdon."

"Then he must have come back by way of the Rue des Abbesses, and by the steps that lead to the square near the mayor's office."

"Yes, but what could be his motive ?"

"To prevent Monsieur Gerfaut from identifying the house. He feared that the sculptor would find it, so he prepared his bottle of vitriol, and lay in wait for him on the doorstep. When he saw him approaching, he thought his victim was alone : we were walking along very quietly behind him, you recollect ; besides, he had no reason to suppose that Monsieur Gerfaut had summoned us. He probably fancied that Monsieur Gerfaut had discovered the rope round the woman's neck himself, and that he had retraced his steps in the hope of finding the house from which the litter had been taken. On seeing the gentleman return, the rascal said to himself : 'You think you have me now, but you are mistaken, for I am going to burn your eyes out.' And the villain kept his word !"

"Yes, and if we had not been here, and the gentleman had consequently

been obliged to grope his way along until he met somebody, he would never have been able to point out the house to any one. Besides, people would have believed that he had invented the story, especially when they saw that he was a little drunk. They would have taken him home, without even stopping to listen to him. But what surprises me most is that he was so near the house when we met him. He told us that he had been walking about for a long time."

"The truth is, he knew nothing at all about it. He had drunk too much to be conscious of what he was doing, or of what was going on around him. The fact that the man was lying in wait for him here is sufficient proof that this is the house."

The commissary came up from one direction, just as the locksmith arrived from the other. His first words to the captain of police were: "This is undoubtedly a very strange affair, and one which will not be easily unravelled, but we shall succeed eventually, I think. The sergeant tells me that he knows the murdered woman by sight. He is sure that she resided at Montmartre, and it is probable that she lived in this very house. If the man who murdered her is still here, the mystery will soon be cleared up. Tell the locksmith to open the door."

The commissary was accompanied by four policemen, two of them provided with lanterns, so, including Colache, there were now seven in the little party, quite enough to effect the arrest successfully, especially as there was no counterfeiters' den to be raided, or a band of brigands to be captured. The locksmith set to work, though somewhat reluctantly, as men of his class and calling are not particularly fond of assisting the police. "Heaven grant that the rascal has not erected a barricade inside!" muttered the officer of the peace.

"Heaven grant, rather, that he has not decamped!" rejoined the commissary.

After several fruitless attempts, the locksmith found a key that fitted, and the door was opened without any further difficulty. One of the lantern-bearers entered first; the commissary and the officer followed, then two policemen, and finally Colache, with the other lantern-bearer for a companion. The other policemen remained in the street with the locksmith. The passage was paved with rough stones, and the walls were damp and mouldy. Indeed, the house looked as if it had been uninhabited for a long time. The officer called attention to this fact, but the commissary replied: "I was not unprepared for this squalor. The woman I just saw was dressed like a beggar, and it is only natural that she should have lived in a hovel."

"Still, if she occupied the house alone, she must have been obliged to pay a high rent for it."

"We can discover the owner of the property without much difficulty, and he will give us some information respecting his tenants. The perpetrator of the crime is the woman's husband, perhaps."

"What is that, Colache?" hastily inquired the officer at this moment.

"Something I just picked up behind the door," replied Colache, handing his superior a scrap of silk.

"Let me see," said the commissary. "Ah, ha, it is a scrap torn from a dress, and a very handsome dress too, upon my word! a dress of the richest gros-grain silk. The murdered woman never had such a dress, I'll be bound."

"And the piece was not cut, but torn out. That is singular."

"I think it was a woman who threw the vitriol in the gentleman's face," said Colache. "She shut the door so quickly that her dress caught in it, and rather than open it again she wrenched herself away. I was sure that the man had not had time to get back here again."

"Then this woman must have been his accomplice. Your theory is very plausible."

"I think so, too," remarked the officer. "While the man was getting the body of the murdered woman safely out of the way, his female accomplice kept watch in the alley."

"Besides, it is always women who resort to vitriol throwing," growled Colache. "They invariably go for a person's eyes when they fight."

"Well, if she is here, we shall soon find her," replied the commissary, "especially as the house is only one storey high. Let us search the basement first."

The alley led to a flight of steps. On descending these, and entering the basement, they only found two rooms, one on either side of a narrow hall, and both quite destitute of furniture. The whitewashed walls were peeling away in many places, and the ceiling was so badly cracked that it seemed likely to fall at any moment. A thick coating of dust covered the floor, and there were no ashes nor soot in the fireplace. "There has been no fire here for years," remarked the officer, "nor does it look as if any one had been here for a long time, for there are no footprints on the floor."

"So it could not have been here that the crime was committed. Let us look elsewhere."

"Excuse me, sir," interposed Colache, who had been groping about in every nook and corner with one of the lanterns, "but here is a spike driven into the wall, about seven feet from the floor. It could not have been done very long ago, judging from the break in the plastering, and this may have been the place where the woman was hanged."

"That is true, there are several bits of plaster on the floor underneath, but a chair or ladder would have been needed, and I see nothing of the kind about."

"But some one has been walking here," insisted Colache, after carefully examining the floor. "I am sure of that, though whoever it was took great care to efface his footprints."

"Very well, we will return here presently, after we have arrested the woman. We must find her first of all. Let us go upstairs now."

They could only ascend the staircase in single file, for it was not merely very narrow, but extremely rickety as well. This time Colache headed the procession, the commissary having assigned him to this post of honour as a reward for the shrewdness he had displayed. The arrangement of the floor above was exactly like that of the basement; one room on either side of a narrow landing. On the left there was a bedroom, in which there was no bed, however, but only an alcove for one; on the right, a second apartment with fragments of paper still clinging to the walls, and the ceiling ornamented with a stucco cornice. In the fireplace lay a pile of refuse—worn-out cooking utensils, broken glasses and bottles, and empty pomade jars. There was a number of the latter, with fragments of ivory-handled tooth and hair-brushes.

Colache suddenly picked up the stopper of a handsome cut-glass scent bottle. "This rather indicates the gay woman," he remarked, thoughtfully, as he examined it.

"If a woman of that character ever resided here, she must have moved long ago," answered the officer. "The house is almost in ruins, and the poorest mechanic would hardly condescend to occupy it now."

"The worst is that it seems to be empty," remarked the commissary. "Still, how could the woman have managed to escape? Let us search the loft and then the cellar, if there is one."

But there was no loft, or, at least, if there were any space between the ceiling of the upper floor and the roof, it was only accessible to rats. A careful search in the basement resulted in the discovery of no trap-door leading to a cellar below. "What a miserable hovel it is!" exclaimed Colache. "Who could have been willing to live in a house without either garret or cellar?"

"But the woman couldn't have had wings," remarked the commissary. "She must be concealed somewhere in the house."

"Unless she slipped past the gentleman unnoticed, immediately after throwing the vitrol in his face," remarked the officer.

"This is a sufficient proof that she did not leave at that time," responded the commissary, holding up the bit of silk she had left behind her. "Let us try again. Look under the stairs, and see if there is anything there."

Colache obeyed. "Here is a step-ladder and a hammer," he called out, after a moment. The commissary at once satisfied himself of the truth of this important discovery, and saw that the step-ladder and hammer were both new.

"They were evidently purchased for the express purpose," he remarked, "and it certainly was not the dead woman who concealed them here afterwards. We must question the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood."

"Look, here is a door!" exclaimed Colache.

"Ah, the mystery is solved, then. This house must have two entries. Try to open the door, and if you can't, send for a locksmith."

The door was not locked, and Colache had no difficulty in opening it. "A passage," muttered the commissary. "Let us go on a little further."

The whole party entered a vaulted passage, which seemed to extend under the next house, but which finally led them to another door. This proved to be locked on the outside, and they were again obliged to summon the locksmith, who opened it for them without any trouble. They then saw that it opened into a dimly-lighted street. "Where are we?" inquired the commissary.

"This is what is called the Passage de Constantine, or else the Passage de Guelma, I don't exactly know which," replied Colache. "But I do know that it leads to the Boulevard de Clichy, and the woman must have managed to escape by it."

Such was also the opinion of Colache's superior officers. They both realised that the expedition was a failure, and they looked inquiringly at each other. "This was evidently a very cleverly-planned crime," said the commissary. "It is plain, too, that we must search elsewhere for the guilty parties. Monsieur Gerfault must have enemies, and by questioning them——"

"I don't think it was a part of their scheme to injure him," interrupted the officer of the peace. "Unfortunately for him, he happened to pass here just at the critical moment. The scoundrel in charge of the litter saw that he was drunk, and applied to him for help, as he hoped that he

would not recognise the streets through which he took him, much less the house. Meanwhile the female accomplice remained in the alley with her bottle of vitriol, in case their innocent victim should have sufficient sense to find his way back ; but she had no idea that I was following him so closely with my men. However, I would willingly wager almost any amount that she never saw Monsieur Gerfaut before in her life."

"I believe you are right, and that the best thing for us to do is to try to discover who the murdered woman is. I think this will not prove a difficult task, as the sergeant declares that she is very well known in this part of Paris."

## II.

A WEEK has elapsed. The physicians have pronounced their verdict. Gerfaut is hopelessly blind—blind for life. The vitriol has done its terrible work thoroughly. The unfortunate sculptor has, however, become resigned to his fate, or, at least, he seems resigned. He even tries to console Camille ; but his efforts in this direction are attended with but little success. She nearly died of grief when Graindorge brought her father home to her on the fatal night when a wicked hand destroyed his sight for ever. She had not retired to rest, but was sitting up waiting for him, for she had a presentiment that the dinner at the Grand Hôtel would have some unfortunate result. It was she who met her father and Graindorge at the foot of the stairs. She had heard the outside door open, so she ran down with a light, although she did not recognise her father's usually firm, elastic tread. She could not realise the extent of the calamity at first. She thought that her father had been taken to the station-house in a state of intoxication, and that a policeman had been ordered to see him safely home ; so she was only waiting until they were alone to lecture him soundly ; but when she looked at him a second time she realised the terrible truth.

The heart-rending scene that followed was witnessed by Graindorge, who was really a most worthy, kind-hearted fellow, and who begged permission to call the next day to inquire after the injured man, and report what progress had been made in the attempt to discover the perpetrator of the crime. Camille granted the desired permission very cordially, for she was grateful for the interest he showed in her father's welfare as well as for the excellent care he had taken of him. Graindorge had also related all the particulars of the unfortunate affair to Camille, and she ardently longed for the capture and conviction of the scoundrels who had done her poor father such an irreparable injury. She longed for vengeance, for she fancied that the plot had been planned for the express purpose of injuring him. She even went so far as to believe that he had been the victim of some rival sculptor's jealousy. Gerfaut knew very well that he had no enemies, and that there was not a single artist in Paris capable of ridding himself of a competitor by such an odious crime. He anathematised the strange fatality of which he had been the victim, but he cared little whether the villains were punished as they deserved or not, for the chastisement bestowed upon them, no matter how severe it might be, would never restore his sight. His was no cowardly nature ; so he faced the future that now lay before him bravely and unshrinkingly. He renounced all hopes of distinguishing himself by any great work of art, but his keenest

pang was the thought that his daughter would be doomed to the dreary existence of a blind man's guardiau. He had already been trying to persuade her that he could get on very well without her, and that she must not think of sacrificing all her former pleasures in order to remain constantly with him. But Camille would not even listen to these expostulations, and firmly declared her intention of devoting herself entirely to her filial duties, even if she were compelled to renounce all her hopes of happiness. Her love was irrevocably given to the man of her choice, but she had ceased to think of marriage, and when Philip de Charny came to pay his formal visit on the day but one after the catastrophe, no allusion was made to the subject during the first melancholy interview that he had with M. Gerfaut.

M. de Charny seemed to be deeply grieved by the calamity which had befallen the father of his betrothed, and he had the tact and good taste to say nothing about his pretensions; contenting himself with expressing his sympathy in the warmest terms, and requesting permission to call frequently. Poor Gerfaut, who had resolved to study this suitor for his daughter's hand so carefully, could now only hear him. The sculptor who had formerly prided himself so much upon his skill as a physiognomist, was no longer able to judge the countenance, the gestures, and bearing of the young man whom Camille had chosen for her future husband. But the count's voice was gentle and melodious, and his words were persuasive, even eloquent. He said exactly what ought to be said, and nothing that ought not to be said. There were two equally dangerous extremes to be avoided, formal politeness and exaggerated protestations of sympathy and commiseration. He struck the happy medium, and this not only won him the goodwill of the father, but touched the heart of the daughter. M. de Charny pleased Gerfaut, and gained his confidence at their very first interview.

The very natural result of all this was that the sculptor, prompted by a spirit of self-sacrifice, urged Camille to appoint a day for the marriage, to which he had been so strongly opposed prior to his accident, and which Camille was now inclined to abandon out of regard for him. At least, it seemed to her that she must wait until her father would become accustomed to the idea of sharing her affection with a stranger, and, until that happened, it was enough for her to know that her lover would be received on a footing of friendly intimacy. Such had now become the case, and he called frequently, but without taking undue advantage of the permission he had received.

Marcel Brunier also called very often. In compliance with Gerfaut's invitation, he presented himself at the sculptor's house three days after the banquet at the Grand Hôtel, and it was then that he learned for the first time of the calamity that had befallen his father's old friend. The account made Marcel wretched beyond description. He reproached himself bitterly for having allowed Gerfaut to accompany him home, and he secretly vowed to atone for this by doing everything in his power to amuse and divert the poor blind man, whose only comfort now was the society of those he loved. And so Marcel now spends nearly all his leisure hours with him, as well as his evenings and holidays. He asserts no claim to Mademoiselle Gerfaut's notice, like M. de Charny; for he does not even dream of winning her for a wife, though he thinks her inexpressibly charming. He tries to content himself with seeing her, listening to her, and helping her in the difficult task of amusing her father. He discusses art

with Gerfaut, endeavours to keep him informed respecting everything that is going on in the artistic world, reads the newspapers to him, and consults him about the plays he continues to write, without much expectation that they will ever be accepted, however.

Camille is infinitely grateful to him for these kind attentions to her father, and looks forward to his coming with almost sisterly eagerness. She would, perhaps, feel an even tenderer affection and sympathy for him if she had made his acquaintance some months earlier, but now her hand and heart are already pledged to another. She is much less reserved with Marcel's sister, Annette Brunier, one of the best and prettiest of girls. Marcel had brought her to Batignolles, at the request of Gerfaut, who wished to provide Camille with a companion of her own age, and who certainly could not have made a better choice. The two girls took a great liking to each other at their first meeting, and it seemed to them that they must have known and loved each other for years.

Camille has already planned out her life. Every morning she superintends her father's toilet. She breakfasts with him, and patiently tries to teach him to use his hands without the aid of his eyes. When the weather is pleasant, she accompanies him to the Parc Monceau, where they sit side by side and talk. On other days she goes downstairs with him to his studio, where he remains until night, while Jean Carnac, his oldest and most promising pupil, retouches the famous statue of the Volunteer of '92. This statue was nearly completed when the sculptor lost his sight, and Carnac is quite competent to finish it for exhibition at the Fine Art Show, which opens in about two months' time. Gerfaut does not suffer at all now. His wounds have healed, and the acid that blinded him has not disfigured him to any great extent. His features, with the exception of the eyes, escaped injury; he still possesses the same luxuriant, curly hair and flowing beard; and, with his sightless eyes, he resembles the statue of the Rhone more strikingly than ever.

His studio is spacious and well-lighted. It is not a richly decorated, coquettish apartment, like a painter's studio. The coarse work attendant upon the modelling of a statue does not allow of the luxurious appointments which attract fashionable ladies to the studios of celebrated portrait-painters. There are too many unwieldy blocks of marble and buckets of moist clays, too much plaster and scaffolding. And yet Camille has managed to transform the bare room into a very comfortable place. The walls are draped with old tapestry; cosy easy-chairs and sofas abound, to say nothing of work-tables, chiffoniers loaded with books, portfolios of engravings, and bronzes which the blind man can no longer see, but which he loves to touch, in order to bring their graceful forms freshly to his mind. It is no longer a mere studio; it is the room where the family assemble and pursue their daily avocations. When Annette Brunier comes she brings with her the materials she uses in the manufacture of artificial flowers, and in this way she loses no time, for she can talk while she makes her roses, and, thanks to the clever arrangements of Camille, who has reserved a corner for her friend's convenience, she is no longer compelled to earn her bread seated in solitary loneliness in her little room in the Rue Labat. She is not obliged to wait until Sundays for a walk now. She comes alone, when her brother is detained at his desk, and comes almost every day—so often, indeed, that Cousin Brigitte is a trifle jealous of her, and not unfrequently absents herself from the little re-unions which are held in the studio almost every afternoon.

Such was the position of affairs when, one afternoon during the week immediately following the catastrophe, Gerfaut and the two girls were in the studio with Jean Carnac, who was putting a few finishing touches to the head of the Volunteer. Camille was reading aloud the life of Benvenuto Cellini, to which her father paid very little attention, although the book was well calculated to interest him. Annette was busily engaged in mounting a rose, and Carnac was gazing at her from his lofty perch much oftener than he had any business to do.

"What are you up to now?" cried Gerfaut, suddenly. "Are you still at work on the cockade? Camille, lead me to the steps, and help me to mount them."

Just then, however, the door opened, and Rose, the waiting-maid, entered with that mysterious air which servants always assume when they come to announce an unexpected visitor. "What is it?" inquired Mademoiselle Gerfaut, who had just risen to lead her father from his arm-chair to the steps.

"Two ladies, mademoiselle," replied Rose. "They wish to see your father."

"You know very well that my father receives no visitors."

"I told them so; but they insist upon seeing you. One of them is Madame Stenay."

Camille made a gesture of refusal. She thought that this friend of her happier days had deferred her visit of condolence too long, and she felt inclined to put an end to the acquaintance.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Gerfaut. "Show her in. You have none too many diversions, my dear, and I must become accustomed to showing my sightless eyes and scarred face. If you send Madame Stenay away, she won't invite you to any more of her receptions, and I certainly hope you won't give them up. I am not sure but what I will go with you, for I shouldn't wonder if I became quite a society man now that I am blind, and I shall perhaps end by becoming a lover of music."

"As you please," murmured Camille, still rather undecided.

Then, as she saw Annette rise to give place to a person with whom she was not acquainted, Camille caught hold of her new friend's hand, and said: "Pray remain, and go on with your work as if we were alone. I am not at all anxious to do the honours of the studio, and I will come and take a seat near you as soon as I have exchanged a few words with the visitors. Show the lady in," she added, turning to the maid.

She had quite forgotten that there were two visitors, and she was slightly disconcerted when she saw an entire stranger enter in company with Madame Stenay. Madame Stenay herself was a very stout woman, about fifty years of age, who had been handsome enough in her youth, but who had been greatly disfigured by premature corpulence. In spite of her pretensions to majestic elegance, she looked much more like a fat market woman than a wealthy lady famed for her agreeable entertainments. Her companion, however, had a very different figure, and an infinitely more charming face. She was still young, certainly not more than five-and-thirty, and though her complexion was perhaps a little lacking in freshness, her eyes sparkled with incomparable brilliancy. Her nose was slightly aquiline; her full red lips disclosed teeth as white as pearls; and her luxuriant hair of that rich auburn tint so much admired by the Venetian painters, fell in heavy clustering curls from under a broad-brimmed hat, worn far back on her head. Her whole aspect was charming

in the extreme, though an occasional knitting of her eyebrows imparted a rather stern expression to her face at times.

However, her rather peculiar style of beauty was well calculated to win the admiration of an artist, and Carnac certainly did not deprive himself of the pleasure of staring at the stranger. Could Gerfaut have seen her face, he would have gladly paid handsomely to copy it in marble, for such models are rare, and he had long dreamed of executing a figure of Liberty, somewhat out of the conventional order—a living, breathing, speaking Liberty, instead of a cold copy of the antique Minerva.

"You are doubtless offended with me, my dear child," began Madame Stenay, "and I cannot wonder at it; but you must allow me to explain why you have not seen me since this terrible calamity befell your father."

"Here is my father, madame," interrupted Camille, displeased that her visitor should apologise to her instead of to the injured man.

"Ah, good heavens! I really beg your pardon," exclaimed the tactless visitor. "I did not recognise Monsieur Gerfaut, it is so long since I have seen him."

"Yes," replied Gerfaut; "besides, I have changed greatly within the past week. I have lost both my eyes, and that alters a person's appearance very much."

"I am happy to see that you bear your terrible misfortune so cheerfully, and I assure you that I have deeply sympathised with the grief your poor dear daughter must feel. A fear that my visit might be regarded as an intrusion is all that prevented me from calling sooner. However, one of my best friends, who is now, I believe, a very good friend of yours—I refer to the Count de Charny—brought me news of you every day, and as soon as I learned that you were free from pain, I ventured to call; and I cannot be sufficiently grateful for your kindness in receiving me."

"It is I who am indebted to you. I need diversion sorely, and if you should take it into your head to bring all the frequenters of your receptions with you, I should be delighted. We could then have a little dancing here in my studio."

This reply was a great relief to Camille, whose greatest desire was to ensure her father's pleasure and comfort; but she also recollected that there was a stranger present, and that it was time to ascertain what was Madame Stenay's object in bringing her. The lady with the sparkling eyes did not seem at all uncomfortable, though the scene was certainly a very strange one: Gerfaut enthroned in his arm chair; Annette bending over her work; Carnac perched upon a high scaffold; and Camille, who seemed to be not a little surprised at the advent of the new-comers.

"How stupid I am!" exclaimed Madame Stenay suddenly. "I quite forgot to introduce to you Madame Marguerite de Carouge, a famous *prima donna*, who has just returned from Russia, and who has kindly promised to sing at my house next Wednesday. She came to see me to day, just as I was starting out to call on you, and——"

"Mademoiselle," interrupted the lady who had been introduced as a great artiste, "I entreat you to believe that I should not have ventured to come here had not Madame Stenay almost compelled me to do so. There is but one extenuating circumstance which I can plead as an excuse for having yielded to her persuasion, and that is my intense admiration for your father's talent."

"So my fame has reached Russia!" exclaimed Gerfaut, gaily. "I did not suspect it, upon my word!"

"Your name is widely known there," replied Madame de Carouge. "But it was not there that I learned to appreciate your talent. I am a Frenchwoman, and a thorough Frenchwoman too. I have just spent a year in St. Petersburg, singing in concerts there, and I hope I shall not be obliged to return, although my visit was a great success in every respect."

"Then you must sing here. If Madame Stenay has cherished the hope of monopolising you, so much the worse for her. You certainly will not refuse this pleasure to an old artist, who is the more anxious to hear you from the fact that he cannot see you. I should like to execute a bust of you, for I am sure that you are beautiful."

"Wonderfully beautiful!" said a deep bass voice—the voice of Carnac.

The master had guessed rightly, and the pupil could not help giving vent to the admiration with which he had been inspired by the lovely and striking face of the *prima donna*. His enthusiastic exclamation made her smile, and put every one in a good humour.

"I was sure of it," exclaimed Gerfaut. "Carnac is a terribly idle fellow, but he always says exactly what he thinks, and the good-for-nothing fellow has the eye of a true artist. I have no eyes of any kind now, and the thought makes me furious. I should so much like to carve your lineaments in marble that if you will indulge a blind man's whim, I think I will try, even now."

"I would gladly do anything in my power to give you pleasure," said Madame de Carouge, graciously, "but I fear that a description of my features, no matter how accurate it might be, would not enable you to reproduce them in marble."

"Unfortunately, no. There is another means, however, but I should not be sure of success; besides, I should never dare to propose it to you."

"But I beg that you will."

"I can see tolerably well with my fingers, as I have proved more than once; that is, I can make the sense of touch take the place of the sense of vision. Sometimes, when night has overtaken me in my studio, I have continued to model in the dark, and my work has been none the worse for it. I think I should soon be able to form a very correct idea of a person's features by touching them, and I had resolved to make such an attempt, but upon a paid model, of course, my dear madame."

"It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, it seems to me," murmured the singer, who did not seem disposed to offer herself as a subject for this artistic experiment.

"No, no, not impossible. There was certainly one painter who has exhibited pictures signed: 'Ducornet, born without arms.' No doubt I can't put 'Gerfaut, born blind,' on my statues, as I have but just lost my poor eyes; still, with the aid of Jean Carnac here, I shall yet model some things which my daughter will not be ashamed of."

"You certainly display great courage in your misfortune. You are not only a great artist, but a very brave man."

"Why should I bewail my lot? If I were despondent, I should only make my daughter still more wretched, and I have caused her sorrow enough already."

"What will you think, my dear sir, when I tell you that I have not yet heard the particulars of your unfortunate adventure?" interposed Madame Stenay. "The only person I have seen who knew anything about the affair is Monsieur de Charny, and he merely told me that you

had been the victim of a most deplorable blunder—that a stranger had thrown vitriol in your eyes by mistake, and that——”

“Let us say no more about it. I only got what I deserved.”

“Oh, father, how can you say so?” murmured Camille. “The wretches who destroyed your sight will be arrested, I trust, and then——”

“What! are they not already under arrest?” inquired Madame de Carouge. “The police must certainly have been very remiss.”

“I am afraid so,” replied Gerfaut, quietly.

“Would you believe it, madame,” continued Camille, “my father has never been summoned before a magistrate, and has only been questioned once by a commissary of police?”

“I am not anxious for an examination, by any means, pray understand that,” remarked the sculptor. “It is no very pleasant task to answer a host of questions; besides, I could tell the officials nothing new. They are acquainted with all the particulars.”

“But they certainly ought to have told you what progress they were making in their search, and they have not even deigned to do that. We have seen no one except a worthy policeman, who called once, and who promised to come again when he had anything new to report. I am not as indifferent as you seem to be, and I have given orders that he should be admitted as soon as he presents himself.”

“Here he is now, mademoiselle,” remarked Jean Carnac, who from the top of the step-ladder could see all the passers-by in the street below.

This Carnac, a student of nature, as he styled himself, was certainly the strangest creature that ever handled a sculptor's chisel. Like Camille's father, he had begun by carving urns and other funereal emblems for contractors in tombstones; but he had learned, unaided, to model very creditably in clay, and to execute some very promising work in marble. Picked up one day while lounging about the outer boulevards by Gerfaut, he had devoted himself to him, as a dog devotes himself to his master. He would willingly have died for him; and he had sworn to wreak vengeance upon the scoundrels who had destroyed the sculptor's sight. He had been quietly but diligently searching for them, and though firmly resolved to dispense with the assistance of the police in capturing them, he was not sorry to hear what the detectives had been doing for several days past; so he eagerly awaited the entrance of Graindorge (who had just been admitted to the house by Rose), and decided to listen to every word of the conversation that would certainly ensue. Physically, Carnac was a tall, vigorous, bearded fellow, as brown as a mulatto, very untidy in his personal appearance, and rather ill-bred, but thoroughly well-meaning and kind-hearted—in fact, a man to be liked and esteemed, when you learned to know him well. Annette, whom he had shocked at first by the uncouthness of his manners, finally took a real liking to him, and began to talk with him, greatly to his delight, for he admired her immensely, probably by the law of contrasts, for she was small and slender, with very light hair, a very fair complexion, a calm and gentle face, a modest bearing, and all the reserve and diffidence of a school-girl.

Graindorge entered, cap in hand, and all eyes were fixed upon him, for every one knew the object of his visit. Annette and Camille had both come to regard him as a friend; Madame de Carouge and Madame Stenay were anxious to hear what he had to say; and Gerfaut, warned by his assistant's exclamation, was prepared to bestow a cordial welcome on the worthy fellow, who had not only defended him before the accident, but

had done everything in his power to relieve him afterwards. "So, here you are, my friend," he cried, warmly. "My daughter was just complaining that we had heard nothing from you, and I, myself, was beginning to think that you had forgotten the way to the house. However, I thank you for remembering us. Better late than never, you know."

"It is not my fault if I didn't come sooner," replied Graindorge. "The service, you know, is very exacting. We have but little leisure; and, besides, I was waiting for fresh discoveries."

"Have there been any?" inquired Camille.

"None of much importance, mademoiselle. We have discovered the name of the murdered woman and her avocation; that is all.

"The murdered woman!" repeated Madame de Carouge, apparently at a loss to understand the policeman. To tell the truth, this beginning could hardly fail to astonish her, as she must be even more ignorant of the particulars of the affair than Madame Stenay.

"Yes, madame," replied Graindorge, gazing intently at her all the while, "for she certainly did not hang herself; she didn't want to die, though she wasn't happy—oh, no, not by any means, for she sang and begged in the streets—neither a very pleasant nor a lucrative business, as every one knows, but——"

"She was dressed like a beggar, that's a fact," interrupted Gerfaut. "It seems to me I can still see her lying on the litter."

"She was not always poor. In former years she was an actress, and kept her carriage. But one can't always be young and pretty. The downfall came; she had a little money left, but it seems that she spent it all on some good-for-nothing fellow——"

"Never mind the particulars, my friend," said the blind man quickly, remembering his daughter. "What was the poor woman's name?"

"Her real name was Marie Bracieux, though she was known on the stage by a different one. At Montmartre, where she lived in poverty for several years, she was commonly called old Mother Bracieux. She lived at the back of the cemetery, in a miserable hovel, where I wouldn't keep my dog."

"Then it was not in her own house that she was killed?"

"No, sir. The house in the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts has not been occupied for five or six years. But the strangest thing about it all is that she used to live there when she had enough money to pay her rent. It was there that she reduced herself to poverty for the sake of a handsome young gentleman. When she left the house, she was obliged to abandon her furniture, as the last quarter's rent was still unpaid, and the landlord sold it, and then shut up the house for want of other tenants."

"Is the wretch who committed the crime known?" inquired Madame de Carouge.

"No, madame; he visited her secretly, and by no means often, even when she was in better circumstances. After she became penniless, he deserted her entirely. There may be some persons at Montmartre who saw him several years ago, but they have now quite forgotten how he looked, and this is very unfortunate, for he was probably the perpetrator of the crime."

"If so, he is taller than I am, and wears a full beard," remarked Gerfaut.

"Oh, he would not have failed to disguise himself; besides, it might have been some other man whom you assisted in carrying the litter. The

person you saw was certainly not alone; there was at least one person with him—a woman."

"In that case, it must have been the woman who threw the vitriol at me."

"Unquestionably!" exclaimed Graindorge. "The fact that my comrade found a scrap of her dress in the hastily-closed door is sufficient proof of that. The house has two entrances. One of these is in the Passage de Guelma, where her accomplice was perhaps waiting for her in a cab—there are plenty of them to be found about the Boulevard Rochechouart, which he went towards when he pretended to go for us. Ah, the pair of them managed very cleverly. They both either hanged the old woman or compelled her to hang herself, for the physicians who have examined the body say there are no signs of violence upon it; no bruises on the arms, nor any marks of fingers on the wrists. However, they think a slip-noose was placed about her neck, and that she was hoisted up into the air against her will and in spite of her struggles."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Madame Stenay. "What monsters men are! And the woman who helped in such a crime ought certainly to be burned alive!"

"But how could they have managed to enter the house and bring their victim there?" inquired Gerfaut.

"If her former lover was the murderer, and I am willing to wager my head that he was, he probably kept a key," said Graindorge. "He must have asked her to meet him in the vacant house, either promising to give her some money or to renew his connection with her, and she was fool enough to believe him. His accomplice was probably the poor woman's favoured rival and successor. But they will never be discovered. They will not remain in the neighbourhood, you may rest assured of that."

"What!" said Camille, who was listening with eager attention; "have the police abandoned the pursuit already? Are the crimes of such vile wretches to go unpunished?"

"The police have not abandoned the pursuit, mademoiselle, but fresh crimes are being committed every day, and the authorities are obliged to give their attention to the new ones, so that the old ones are laid aside until some chance gives the detectives a clue to the mystery. This happens sometimes, but not often."

"But it is frightful to think that the police depend upon chance for the arrest of creatures who may repeat their murderous attacks to-morrow upon you, my dear Camille, or on Madame de Carouge, or myself. If such be the case, nobody is safe," said Madame Stenay.

"I don't think we have anything to fear from such wretches," replied Madame de Carouge, smiling. "They are in no way connected with us. I can't even understand what object they could have had in murdering that poor creature. They could not have killed her to obtain her money, for she was in abject poverty."

"That's true," muttered Graindorge; "but she may have had in her possession some letters or papers which her ex-lover wished to secure—letters which he had written to her soliciting loans, or acknowledgments of amounts received which he could not repay. These would be dangerous weapons in her hands, in case he was a gentleman. They say, too, that she had several pawn tickets from the Mont-de-Piété, and that she nearly starved herself to renew them every year."

"Monsieur de Charny!" announced Rose, at this moment opening the door,

At the sound of this name the scene changed. Camille blushed, her father rose, and Annette, who was not a very enthusiastic admirer of the brilliant nobleman, resumed her work. Madame Stenay uttered an exclamation of delight, however, while Madame de Carouge assumed the dignified air of a lady to whom a gentleman she has never previously seen is about to be presented. Carnac descended from his perch with the intention of putting his tools aside for the day, and Graindorge beat a hasty retreat behind the colossal statue of the Volunteer of '92. Philippe de Charny was a handsome cavalier in every sense of the word. Of medium height and symmetrical build, he had extremely regular and refined features, large, expressive blue eyes, and a long drooping chestnut moustache, which richly deserved the praise that Camille had bestowed upon it. He bowed deferentially to the young girl as he passed her, but had the good taste to go straight towards Gerfaut and shake both his hands affectionately before noticing Madame Stenay, who hastened towards him, crying: "How do you do, my dear count? Your coming is most opportune. Here is our great artiste, Madame de Carouge, for whom we have been waiting so impatiently. She has come at last, and you will hear her at my reception next Wednesday."

The count bowed politely, and the great artiste returned the salute in a formal and dignified manner.

"These resemblances are strange," muttered Graindorge, who had not taken his eyes off the lady's face. "The eyes, nose, mouth and hair are exactly like Margot's. She is Margot to the very finger-tips. Only the scar is wanting."

The remark was not lost in empty air, for Carnac was within hearing, and nothing ever escaped him. "Margot?" he inquired softly. "What Margot? I know half-a-dozen of them."

"It isn't likely that you know the one I mean, for she disappeared seven or eight years ago; but I was entrusted with the task of watching her for about six months, and she had one of those faces a man never forgets."

"Watching her, did you say? Was she a thief, then?"

"No; or at least I never heard that she stole anything; but she was none too good. She danced at the public halls. You should have seen her at the Reine Blanche or at the Favier ball at Belleville. I took her to the station house three times myself, and each time I narrowly escaped being killed by some of her set—a set of dare-devils who served as her body-guard."

"And did she look like this lady?"

"I should think she did. But it can't be; for Margot was at least thirty years old then, and this lady is not more than that now."

"Yes, she is considerably older. Women can't fool me. I know a thing or two. There are certain wrinkles and blue veins that indicate a woman's age as accurately as the record of her birth. Madame de Carouge is a very handsome woman, but she will never see thirty-five again."

"Perhaps you are right; but she hasn't the boldness of manner that characterised Margot; and besides, Margot had a scar on her left cheek. It extended from her nose to her ear, and was caused by a cut from a knife, inflicted, it was said, by a jealous lover. The strangest thing about it was that it did not disfigure her. She knew how to hide it very cleverly, and a casual observer would not have noticed it."

"There are others besides Margot who know how to make themselves

up," significantly replied Carnac, as he examined Madame de Carouge with a critical eye.

She was just then exchanging a few words with the count, to whom she had been introduced by Madame Stenay, and Carnac could only see her profile. The lady visitors with Camille and her suitor were standing around Gerfaut, in the middle of the studio, quite oblivious of the policeman and the student of nature concealed behind the pedestal of the huge statue.

"But, I say, old fellow, you must know what has become of your famous Margot," continued Carnac, who had a faculty of getting on intimate terms with people very quickly.

"No, I don't, upon my word; and I have an idea that nobody else knows, not even the members of her band. The last that was seen of her about here was at a ball at the Elysée Montmartre, where she danced four hundred measures without stopping. Since that time nothing has been seen or heard of her."

"Had she no lover among her band?"

"Perhaps she had; but at all events she had plenty of money at her disposal, for she appeared in costumes that must have cost her a pretty penny. There were persons idiotic enough to declare that she belonged to the detective service; but that was nonsense, of course. I am of opinion that she went to England or America with some admirer."

"But a person can return from either of those countries just as well as from Russia. The lady you see there has just returned from Russia."

"You take her for Margot, evidently; but if she were the same woman she wouldn't be here, nor would Monsieur Gerfaut allow her to talk with his daughter."

"He knows nothing about his visitor. It was that big, fat woman who brought her. I don't say that this Madame de Carouge is your Margot, but such a thing is by no means impossible; and at all events, the matter is worth investigating. Shall you be on duty all day?"

"No. I am free until midnight."

"Then what would you say to some sauerkraut and beer at old Barbizon's restaurant, at six o'clock precisely? You know the establishment, of course."

"I should think I did, and so did Margot, for she often patronised it."

"Then perhaps we shall find some one there who can give us some information about her. Possibly the landlord can."

"I don't think he knows any more about her than I do, but the sauerkraut is not to be refused, especially as I am very fond of it, and you seem to be a good fellow, and not at all stuck up. But I must go home first of all and take off my uniform, for it would never do for one of my comrades or superior officers to see me in uniform in an establishment like that."

"Besides, it would make the other customers look at you with a rather unfriendly eye; so I think you had better do as you propose. I will meet you at six o'clock, in front of the Fernando Circus."

"Very well, but I can't remain with you all night. I must be at a masked ball at the Elysée by midnight."

"Wait a moment, and I will go with you," whispered Carnac, preparing to make his escape from the brilliant company in which he did not feel quite at home.

The others were not thinking of him. Madame de Carouge was the

exclusive object of their attentions. Madame Stenay, who acted as the artiste's chaperon, was doing everything in her power to make her charge appear to the best possible advantage; Gerfaut quite overpowered her with attentions, in the hope of inducing her to return to the studio and sit for the bust he had spoken of. Camille was beginning to take quite a fancy to her, and to long for her to give them a specimen of her much-lauded talent as a singer; and Philippe de Charny, in spite of his position as Mademoiselle Gerfaut's suitor, could not refrain from paying several compliments to the great artiste, who received them like a thorough woman of the world.

"The count has a charming tenor voice, my dear," said Madame Stenay, "and you possess a contralto equal to that of Madame Albani, so my next Wednesday evening reception will set all Paris talking."

"I should be very happy to sing with Monsieur de Charny at your reception, my dear madame," replied Madame de Carouge, "but in future I shall only sing for my own pleasure. My late sojourn in Russia proved sufficiently remunerative for me to be able to abstain from singing in public in future. I am at last going to live according to my tastes, and I intend to purchase a little house at Passy or in the neighbourhood of the Parc Monceau, where I can play and sing all day long, and receive my friends."

"Pray decide upon the neighbourhood of the Parc Monceau," exclaimed Gerfaut, "for, in that case, we shall be almost neighbours. The Rue Juffroy, for instance, is quite near us."

"That decides me, my dear sir. I shall certainly look for a house in that part. In the meantime, I must content myself with the furnished flat I have rented in the Rue d'Anjou, at the corner of the Rue Lavoisier. This temporary abode is spacious and comfortable enough, but frightfully gloomy."

"In the Rue d'Anjou, at the corner of the Rue Lavoisier. That is something worth knowing," muttered Carnac. "Now I can go. I have seen enough of this song-bird, and the swell who is going to marry the governor's daughter."

"So have I," murmured Graindorge, making his way cautiously towards the door.

He reached it unnoticed, and Carnac was manœuvring to do the same, when Annette Brunier, who had not left her quiet corner, stopped him as he passed, to say to him in a low tone: "Why are you leaving so soon? My brother is coming, and he would be glad to see you."

"I would gladly remain here until to-morrow, mademoiselle," replied Carnac, "if you and he were the only visitors present, but I don't like snobs, and the person who just came in is a snob of the first water."

"I don't like him any better than you do, but I am very fond of Mademoiselle Gerfaut, and Monsieur de Charny is going to marry her."

"Yes, unfortunately; he has managed to ingratiate himself into her favour, and into my master's also, though I can't understand how. If they had consulted me—but they didn't. They evidently don't think it any business of mine, and so I can do nothing."

"My brother wishes to ask a favour of you," said Annette, timidly.

"A favour! why he can ask a dozen. I am quite at his service, and should be only too glad to be of any use to him or to you, mademoiselle. I cannot offer him my purse, for there is nothing in it, but if it is a question of getting rid of any troublesome person, I have a pair of strong arms, and I am skilled in the use of all kinds of weapons."

"Oh, it is only to accompany us to the Louvre next Sunday. I am a great admirer of the fine arts, especially of sculpture, and it seems to me that I should appreciate what I see better if you were there to point out the masterpieces to me."

"You can rely upon me, mademoiselle. Ah, if you only knew the pleasure you were giving me," stammered Carnac, who was quite unprepared for so much happiness. "I am your brother's most devoted friend for life. Ah, if I could only persuade my master to give him Mademoiselle Gerfaut in marriage!"

Annette gave Carnac a grateful look, but placed her finger on her lips and he recollected that the place and the occasion were alike ill chosen for the expression of such a wish, so he hastened from the room, and Annette, deeply moved, resumed her work.

Gerfaut had now succeeded in persuading Madame de Carouge and Madame Stenay to seat themselves near his arm-chair. Camille and Philippe were a little distance from them. The count seemed to have something to say in private to his betrothed, and the studio was sufficiently large for them to enjoy a *tête-à-tête* without being obliged to take refuge in a corner. "Will you forgive me if I tell you a piece of news that distresses me greatly?" inquired the count, gently. "I so fondly hoped never to be obliged to part from you, but I shall soon be compelled to leave Paris."

"Leave Paris!" exclaimed Camille, "and why?"

"I have never told you, I think, that I have an uncle who resides at Smyrna, where he married the daughter of a wealthy Levantine merchant," replied M. de Charny, with a slightly embarrassed air.

"Well?" said his betrothed, somewhat surprised and alarmed by this beginning.

"This uncle of mine has no children, and I am his sole heir."

"I understand, you are anxious not to run any risk of losing the property," interrupted Mademoiselle Gerfaut, wounded to the heart.

"I would renounce it unhesitatingly rather than incur any risk of losing you," said Philippe de Charny, eagerly; "but this uncle cared for me in my infancy, for I was left an orphan at an early age, and he has always been devotedly attached to me, though I have now not seen him for five years. He has just lost his wife, and is left solitary and alone, far from France, and with a serious illness which compels him to remain in the East. He feels that his end is near, and he wishes to see me again before he dies."

"Ah, if that be the case—I thought——"

"He has written to me several times of late, entreating me to come to him. I have deferred acceding to his request, but his last letter is very urgent."

"Go to him, and at once. I should never forgive myself if I made the slightest objection to your doing so."

"I have not the courage to go without you," rejoined Philippe in his sweetest voice, "and my poor uncle is well aware of it."

"You have told him about me, then?"

"Why shouldn't I confess it? Yes, mademoiselle, while I had only a faint hope of winning you I wrote to him that I was deeply in love with a beautiful young lady whom I longed to marry; and that to leave her before I knew if she would ever consent to become my wife was a sacrifice I could not contemplate. Can you guess what he replied?"

"No—I——"

"His reply was: 'Marry, my dear Philippe. By doing so you will gratify my fondest desire, for our name seems to be in danger of extinction, and I should like to be sure that you will have children to bear it. That knowledge would console me for my departure from this world. I am sure that Mademoiselle Gerfaut is worthy of you, and I should very much like to know her. Why should you defer declaring your love since it is sincere? If she does not return it—though God grant this may not be the case—come to your old uncle who will do his best to console you for your disappointment. If, on the contrary, she loves you, ask her hand of her father, like a gentleman. The daughter of a great artist is the equal of any nobleman; and I am not the person to try to dissuade you from the match. If her father gives his consent, marry as soon as possible and come to Smyrna to spend your honeymoon. I have at least two or three months to live, I hope, and I should like to do the honours of this lovely country to my charming niece. On the sea-shore, at a short distance from the city, I have a villa which is the very home for a newly-married pair. It is ready for your reception. But make haste, my strength is failing, and I can hardly hope to see another spring.'"

"Did he really say that?"

"I will show you his letter if you wish. He is the best of men and most affectionate of uncles."

"I love him already."

"Alas!" resumed Philippe, sadly, "when he wrote thus in obedience to the kind and generous promptings of his noble heart, he could not foresee the dilemma in which your father's recent calamity places me. You did not repulse me when I ventured to tell you that I loved you. You promised me that you would win your father's consent, and he certainly did not refuse it, as he allows me to visit you. I informed my uncle of my good fortune, and just as I began to consider myself the happiest of men, a most unfortunate accident reduces us all to despair. You cannot leave your father, and you must do me the justice to say that I have not attempted to persuade you to do so. I shall wait patiently until you deem me worthy of aiding you in the noble work you have undertaken. I can assure you that Monsieur Gerfaut will find a devoted son in me."

"I do not doubt that," said Camille, softly.

"And yet you hesitate to place me in a position to prove my devotion. I submit to your will, as I would submit to his, had I the happiness of being his son-in-law. But what am I to do? How can I explain to my uncle the predicament in which I find myself? I told you a few moments ago that I intended leaving Paris, but I know that I shall not be able to tear myself away from you, even for a few months, for if, on my return, I found that you had ceased to love me, the disappointment would kill me."

"Can you believe that your absence would cause any change in my feelings? You do me great injustice. I plighted you my troth of my own free will, and when you return you will find me ready to fulfil my promise."

"You are my betrothed; why will you not consent to become my wife? Your father does not object, and when he hears what I have just told you, he will not be cruel enough to oppose a speedy marriage, when it only depends upon you and upon him for us to be united in a few days."

"But don't you see that it is quite impossible for me to leave him?"

"You need not leave him. He can accompany us."

"To Smyrna? You forget that he is blind."

"What difference need that make? It is true that he will not be able to see the East, the splendour of which would have so delighted him, but he can enjoy the warm sunshine and the perfumed air, for Smyrna is a perfect land of roses, and winter is unknown there. Don't you think he would be happier in such a climate than in chilly, foggy Paris, where he will have nothing to occupy or divert his mind, now that he can no longer work to increase his fame?"

"I should be glad to think so, but my father, at his age, has formed habits which it is no easy matter to renounce."

"Your father is as young in mind and feeling as I am myself. Why should he pine for this studio, which can now only remind him of his calamity? And will it be such a terrible sacrifice to renounce the society of persons for whom he cares little or nothing, and who are attracted here rather by curiosity than sympathy? Does he consider Madame Stenay's musical evenings indispensable to his happiness?"

"Certainly not," replied Camille, unable to repress a smile. "But we have some very dear friends—Annette and her brother, for instance."

"A young man who is employed somewhere or other all day, and who finds it convenient and economical to spend his evenings here, instead of at a café. Monsieur Gerfaut does him too much honour in entertaining him, and as for his sister, the little——"

"Don't speak disparagingly of her, I beg you," interrupted Camille "unless you wish to wound me deeply."

"Forgive me, dearest, but I cannot forget that Monsieur Brunier was the cause of your father's misfortunes."

"The involuntary cause; and I know that if he could wreak vengeance on the scoundrels who deprived my father of his sight——"

"That he would not hesitate to give his life to avenge him, you would say. It pains me to think that you depend upon a comparative stranger to find the culprits, especially when that stranger is evidently in love with you." Then seeing that Camille coloured slightly, the count quickly added: "I love you too much not to be jealous."

"Jealous! You have no cause to be so."

"Then prove to me that I am wrong—prove it by doing what I desire—by asking Monsieur Gerfaut to fix the day for our marriage and accompany us to Smyrna. If he will consent, we can be there in less than a month from now, my uncle will give us his blessing before he dies, and I swear to devote every moment of my life to you. We can spend the first few months of our married life there, and later on, after I have closed the eyes of the excellent man who has been a father to me, we can return to France—to this house in which you lived when I first learned to love you—and where we will take up our abode with your—or let me say it—with *our* father?"

Camille, moved to tears, gave her hand to Philippe, and softly replied: "I promise to ask him, and if he does not object, we will be married whenever you like."

M. de Charny was about to thank her with one of those impassioned protestations which rise so naturally to the lips of lovers, when Gerfaut called his daughter. "Where are you?" he asked. "You are leaving me to entertain these ladies unaided."

"Here I am, father," replied Camille.

"You know very well that I understand nothing whatever about music,

and that a great concert at Madame Stenay's house is under discussion. Come here, and bring Monsieur de Charny with you."

"By no means, by no means!" cried Madame Stenay. "Don't disturb the young people. We have an engagement, and Marguerite has already warned me that it is getting late."

"Marguerite?" repeated Gerfaut, inquiringly.

"I mean Madame de Carouge. I am so fond of her and am so much older than she is, that I call her by her Christian name. We must go now, but we shall not leave you comfortless, for here is one of my great friends, Monsieur Marcel Brunier. I was not aware that you knew him."

"He is the son of one of my old schoolmates. How do you do, Marcel? How does the world serve you, my dear fellow?"

Marcel, who had just quietly entered the room, took the hand that Gerfaut extended, and bowed to Camille; but his face clouded when he perceived Philippe de Charny. He did not like him, and always tried to avoid meeting him. "I called for my sister, Monsieur Gerfaut," he replied, with some embarrassment.

"What, so soon? What time is it?"

"Only half-past four; but I promised to go with Annette to call on one of her relatives, who resides at some distance from here." Annette had smiled at her brother when he came in, but she had not moved, and the other ladies, who had probably taken her for a seamstress or workwoman, now favoured her with more attention, and discovered that she was really very pretty. Madame Stenay was even on the point of inviting her to her next reception, but Madame de Carouge suspected her intention, and gave her a slight nudge to prevent her from speaking.

"Adieu, monsieur, or rather *au revoir*," said the *prima donna*. "I shall expect you to keep your promise, and if you will really come to hear me sing I will do my best to convert you into a lover of music."

"Nothing could please me better," replied Gerfaut, "but you are going, Marcel threatens to take away his sister, and so everybody is deserting me."

In the meantime, Camille had approached Marcel, and said to him in a low tone: "Remain, I beg. I wish you to be present at a conversation I am about to have with my father."

"Remain!" repeated Marcel Brunier. "But, mademoiselle, if what you have to say to your father is of a private nature I shall be one too many."

"No," Camille answered firmly. "The happiness of my whole life is involved. I wish you to be a witness of the pledge I am about to make."

Marcel dared not reply; but he began to bitterly regret his coming, for he suspected that the question to be discussed was Mademoiselle Gerfaut's marriage with this detested count; and he felt that Camille was asking a great sacrifice of him in compelling him to witness a betrothal which he only too plainly foresaw. He was surprised, too, that she had not detected the love with which she had inspired him—a hopeless but sincere passion which entitled him to more mercy at her hands. While this short conversation was in progress, Madame de Carouge and Madame Stenay had taken leave of Gerfaut, and left the studio, escorted to the door by the count, who in his secret heart was bitterly cursing Marcel, whom he strongly suspected of being his rival and enemy.

"Are you here, my child?" asked the blind man.

"Yes, father."

"Well, now that the ladies have gone, bring our worthy friend Graindorge to me. I have a host of questions to ask him."

"He left a few moments ago."

"I am sorry for that. I wanted to give him a glass of such cognac as he never drank in his life before; besides, I should like to know if that poor murdered woman was decently buried, and if he can tell me anything about the vile wretch who assisted in the murder, and destroyed my eyesight. Ah! if I had the she-devil in my power, I would show her no mercy, I assure you. Carnac, my good fellow, come here," added Gerfaut, raising his voice.

"Carnac, too, has gone," replied Camille. "It is nearly night, and too dark for him to see to work very well."

"And as he enjoys himself better at a tavern than in the studio he has availed himself of the first excuse for leaving. I was right, then, in saying that every one is deserting me."

"I have no intention of deserting you, neither has Monsieur de Charny, nor Monsieur Brunier, nor my dear Annette. Nor are we sorry to have an opportunity to be alone with you, for I want to talk with you about my intended marriage."

"Ah, you sly puss, you have broached the subject at last! I thought you had decided to postpone it indefinitely. It would seem that you have changed your mind. You are very sensible. If you are waiting for me to recover my eyesight, you will never marry, and I am altogether unwilling that you should condemn yourself to single blessedness for ever. You can speak plainly before Marcel and his sister, whom we now consider as almost members of the family. Did the ladies take Monsieur de Charny away with them?"

"Here he is, father," said Camille, motioning Philippe to approach the arm-chair in which Gerfaut was sitting.

"Then speak, my girl. I am listening, and I am ready to bless you after the most approved fashion, for I suppose that you have now appointed the day."

"It is for you to appoint that."

"I ask nothing better. How long a time will be required for the fulfillment of the legal formalities? It is to you, my dear count, that I address this question, for Camille is no better informed than myself on such matters. I recollect, though, that I married her mother a fortnight after our betrothal. It is true, however, that as neither of us had any property we were spared the trouble of drawing up a marriage contract."

Philippe de Charny was about to reply, but Camille did not give him an opportunity. "We are not considering the subject of legal formalities or marriage contracts just now, father," said she. "I only wish to know if you would like to spend a few months in Smyrna?"

"What are you talking about, child?"

"Monsieur de Charny is obliged to go to Smyrna, to visit an uncle who brought him up, who has not much longer to live, and who wishes to see him before he dies. Now I am determined not to leave you, so if the idea of such a journey is not agreeable to you, I will await Monsieur de Charny's return. If, on the contrary, you are not afraid to undertake it, we will be married in three weeks from now, and leave for Smyrna in company with you on the evening of our marriage."

"Well, well! you have stated the case with a clearness that pleases me, and I am going to reply with equal frankness."

After this remark Gerfaut took his time. He knew very well that the lovers were impatient to hear his decision, and he took a mischievous delight in keeping them in suspense. "Well, yes, my children," he said, at last, "I will go with you upon one condition."

"Whatever that may be, I accede to it," interrupted M. de Charny, eagerly.

"On condition that you will not regard me as an incumbrance."

"You an incumbrance!" cried Camille, throwing her arms about her father's neck.

"A blind man is necessarily an incumbrance. Of course, it is not so bad to have a sightless father when you are only lovers, but when you long to be enjoying the bliss of the honeymoon, you will find it no slight sacrifice to be obliged to give me an arm. It is no very pleasant task to lead an old Belisarius about from morning till night."

"Hush! you will make Monsieur Brunier think that I already begin to complain of being obliged to act as your guide. You know that I shall be only too happy to lead you about: but what I dread for you is the fatigue of the journey, and I am afraid it will be too much of a sacrifice for you to leave your home and studio."

"The thought of that is not an altogether pleasant one, I must admit, and I may sometimes think with longing of my statue, but it is nearly completed now, and Carnac can finish it very well without me. I have always wished to visit the East. I have delayed a little too long, for I shall now have to enter the promised land sightless; but you will tell me the impression it makes upon you, and that will be almost the same as seeing it myself. When do we start?"

"Oh, father, how good you are!" murmured Camille.

"I owe the happiness of my life to you, sir," said Philippe, "since you have been so kind as to grant me Mademoiselle Gerfaut's hand; and my uncle will be indebted to you for the happiness of seeing me again. I can now close his eyes——"

"No one will close mine, as I haven't any left," said Gerfaut, with a gaiety that brought tears to the eyes of his daughter. "But your uncle must be something of an aristocrat. How will he be able to reconcile himself to the companionship of a plebeian like myself?"

"My uncle knows you by reputation, as all Europe knows you, and he has the highest admiration and respect for all great artists."

"Thank you; but I was not fishing for compliments. It is enough for me to know that your uncle is a worthy and sensible man. You can be married whenever you like, my dear, and this evening my future son-in-law must dine with me, and you, too, Marcel."

Could Gerfaut have seen the face of young Brunier, he certainly would not have invited him, for it was evident that the poor fellow was suffering terribly. He managed, however, to stammer out an excuse, and Camille, who now understood the situation only too well, came to his assistance. "No," said she; "Monsieur Brunier has to pay a visit with his sister. He will dine with us some other day." And hastening to Annette, who also understood and who was anxious to get her brother away as soon as possible, she said, kissing her affectionately: "Promise me that you will be my bridesmaid."

Poor Annette's heart felt very heavy, but she could not refuse the request. She departed with her brother, after taking leave of M. Gerfaut, and bowing coldly to the Count de Charny. On reaching the boulevard,

she slipped her arm through Marcel's, saying as she did so: "We will not go there again. It makes you too wretched."

"Makes me too wretched? I don't understand you."

"Can you suppose that I have not detected your love for Camille?"

"I might have loved her perhaps, had I entertained any hope that she could have loved me in return, but Mademoiselle Gerfaut has taken good care to cure me of any such foolish fancy. Still, that is no reason why you should cease to visit her. Remain her friend. She will need one, for she is going to fall into bad hands. This Count de Charny is only marrying her for her money; I am sure of it.

"I hope that you are mistaken, but I don't feel any more confidence in him than you do. This intended journey fills me with vague forebodings. One thing I can't fail to notice: Monsieur Carnac likes the count no better than we do."

"That does not surprise me. Carnac is devoted to Monsieur Gerfaut, and he sees through the nobleman's projects."

"Speaking of Monsieur Carnac, I must tell you that I mentioned our proposed visit to the Louvre to him, and it will give him great pleasure to accompany us to the museum next Sunday."

"Very well; but I hope he will dress himself decently, for up to the present time I have only seen him in the shabbiest garments."

"You have merely seen him in the studio, recollect, and of course a sculptor cannot dress as one does for an evening reception."

"Oh, ho! little sister, you seem to undertake his defence very warmly. Can it be——"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you. He is very polite to me, and it amuses me to hear him talk, but that is all. Nevertheless, I want to look my prettiest next Sunday, and if you wish to please me, instead of taking me to our respected cousin's you will take me to the Mont-de Piété in the Rue Fromentin—it is not much out of our way—so that I can get the earrings I promised to redeem in the month of January."

"The deuce! the month is not yet out, and——"

"You haven't the money, but I have. I carried my week's work back yesterday, and received quite a little sum for it."

"Then I will accompany you with pleasure, provided you won't ask me to go in."

"Certainly not, for if one of your acquaintances saw you, he would think that you had come to pawn your watch to raise money to go to a ball, while an insignificant creature like myself can borrow money on her jewellery without committing an unpardonable sin."

"Especially when she does it to pay the rent. Go and take your earrings out of pawn. I will wait for you in the street, and at the end of the month I will refund you the money you advance."

"Oh, no; you shall do nothing of the kind. I am richer than you are. But tell me, Marcel, what do you think of the lady who came with Madame Stenay? I don't know why, but I can't help thinking that she is an adventuress."

"That is quite possible; Madame Stenay entertains and patronises all kinds of people, beginning with this Count de Charny, whom, I'm sure, she knows little or nothing about. I would wager almost any amount that it was through her that he became acquainted with the Gerfaunts."

"I think it was. You should have seen how rapturously she greeted him when he entered the studio; how eager she was to introduce him to

Madame de Carouge, and to have him sing with that lady at her next reception. By the way, are you going to it?"

"I shall never set foot in the old idiot's house again. My visits have cost me dearly enough already. Had I never gone there, I shouldn't have met Mademoiselle Gerfaut."

"And so have fallen in love with her."

"Let us say no more about that. But, tell me, this Madame de Carouge is a singer, then?"

"A singer of the highest order. I believe she has just returned from Russia, where she spent several years in giving concerts."

"That's strange. I never heard of her before. Her beauty is certainly of a peculiar, though very striking type."

"I can't say that I admire her."

"Did you say that she was not acquainted with Monsieur de Charny?"

"I presume not, as Madame Stenay introduced them to each other; still, I could not help fancying that they had met before, for though they bowed ceremoniously, even coldly, I thought I detected the exchange of a meaning look."

"What induced the lady to pay Monsieur Gerfaut a visit?"

"I have no idea. She remarked that she had met Madame Stenay, who had persuaded her to call on the sculptor with her; however, Monsieur Gerfaut received her so cordially that she will certainly repeat her visit."

"I am very sorry to hear it. I distrust her almost as much as I do Monsieur de Charny."

"That is perhaps saying a little too much. I mean to ask Camille what she thinks of the stranger. It seemed to me that she was not very favourably impressed, and I am glad of it. But I must tell you about another visit that Monsieur Gerfaut received before your arrival; a visit from the policeman who brought him home on the night of the accident, and who came to report the progress the police were making in the investigation of the affair."

"Have they succeeded in finding the creature who threw the vitriol?"

"Unfortunately, no; but they have found out who the murdered woman was, and why she was murdered. She was a former actress who had been reduced to poverty, and they think the scoundrel and his accomplice murdered her to obtain possession of some letters which would compromise him—letters and pawn-tickets, I believe. I heard them speak of the Mont-de-Piété, and as I am going there myself at the present moment, I can't help noticing the coincidence."

"But how did the woman obtain these tickets? At the Mont-de-Piété they don't lend money without security, and Monsieur Gerfaut told me that she was in rags."

"But poor people are accommodated, even when they offer dilapidated clothing, bedding, or cooking utensils. The smallest loan is, I believe, three francs."

"Very possibly; but persons are not murdered to obtain pawn-tickets for articles upon which they have borrowed three francs. This poor woman could have possessed neither jewels nor rich clothing."

"Certainly not, for the policeman declares that she begged her bread. But from what he told us, I think she may have known of some crime committed by the persons who murdered her, and that they put her out of the way for fear that she might denounce them. I hope the police will succeed in finding the culprits."

"You still believe in the police, then? I have very little faith in them myself. If I had the time to devote to this search, I should succeed much better than they will; I'm satisfied of it."

"Monsieur Carnac is searching for the culprits. He told me so yesterday."

"Much good may it do him! I feel no desire to meddle with an affair that does not concern me. If Monsieur Gerfaut wishes to be avenged, let him ask his son-in-law to help him, unless this son-in-law proposes to finish the work, in order to obtain absolute possession of your friend Camille's fortune. She is infatuated with the gentleman, and when her father dies, and she has no one to look after her interests, handsome Monsieur de Charny can do whatever he likes with her and her dowry."

"Marcel, your anger and disappointment render you unjust. You have no grounds for supposing Monsieur de Charny guilty of the intentions you impute to him."

"Don't say any more to me about the man. Here we are in the Rue Fromentin. Go in and get your ear-rings. I will wait for you on the boulevard."

Annette saw that her brother was not disposed to listen to reason on this subject; besides, she did not feel particularly inclined to undertake the defence of a person whom she heartily disliked, although he was to marry Camille; and so, while her brother seated himself upon one of the benches on the Boulevard de Clichy, she turned into the Rue Fromentin. It was twilight, and shame-faced borrowers could now slip in and out of the pawnbroking establishment unseen. This was not the case with Annette Brunier, however. She never made any attempt to conceal her poverty, for the reason that the cause of her poverty was always honourable. The brother and sister practised the utmost economy, and yet they had great difficulty in making both ends meet, and the girl had long known the way to the nearest pawnbroking shop. She felt no anxiety in regard to any disagreeable encounter. Accustomed from an early age to depend upon herself, she knew how to protect herself from insolence, and to hold herself aloof from objectionable persons. So she entered the establishment unhesitatingly, and proceeded straight to the main office, scorning to make use of either of the doors upon which the words "Private Entrance" were inscribed in black letters. There is an aristocracy even among borrowers, and well-dressed people have privileges of which this young girl disdained to avail herself. The office was full, for the winter months are very hard upon the poor, and the payment of the January rent had just emptied many scantily-filled household purses. It was a large, gloomy room, the silence of which was only broken by the voices of the clerks announcing the amounts advanced, or the articles returned. The applicants responded almost in whispers when their numbers were called, and their evident feeling of shame at the straits to which they were reduced, could not have failed to touch the hearts of more fortunate people.

Annette took her place on a bench against one of the walls. There was a crowd of borrowers at one counter, some with small articles to offer as pledges, and others laden with large bundles which the clerks opened. The work of examination and appraising was quickly performed, and the pledges even more speedily rejected, when they were not considered of sufficient value. A woman who had come in the hope of procuring money enough to purchase some food for her children turned away with tears in her eyes. No explanation was necessary. Annette had witnessed the same

heart-breaking sight too often not to understand its meaning, but it grieved her none the less on that account, and she longed to conclude her business and rejoin her brother. The counter where pledges were redeemed was less crowded than the other, and the process less tedious, as it was only necessary to present one's ticket and the necessary amount of money. Annette was engaged in counting out the few coins she would be obliged to pay to regain possession of her coveted ear-rings, when the door was thrown wide open by a young man, who burst into the room like a whirlwind. The girl looked up, and was not a little surprised to see Carnac elbowing his way through the crowd to the counter. He had not perceived her, and her first impulse was to make her escape quietly, for she did not wish him to see her in such a place. But curiosity deterred her. She wanted to know what had brought him there, so she remained, making herself as small as possible in the corner in which she had happened to seat herself.

"Here is my ticket," cried Carnac, raising his arm over the shoulder of a young woman who was redeeming a watch. "Wait on me now, please. I am in a hurry, and must have my coat at once."

"Wait until your turn comes," said the clerk. "Besides, I warn you that you will not get your coat until three o'clock to-morrow. You know very well that the regulations insist upon a day's notice."

"Confound the regulations! Ah, well, provided I have my best coat for Sunday, it is all the same to me."

Annette now understood that the poor fellow had come to prepare himself to accompany her to the museum in suitable attire. It touched her tender heart to see that he was making a sacrifice in order to be able to offer her his arm on their proposed walk through the halls of the Louvre on the following Sunday. Had not a similar desire on her part prompted her to come and redeem her ear-rings? Lovers' minds run in the same channels even more frequently than great minds, perhaps; and without being positively in love with Jean Carnac, Annette Brunier thought him an extremely agreeable young man. She abandoned all idea of avoiding him now. She even wished that he might see her and ask her what brought her there; and this happened, and even sooner than she could have expected, for the student of nature, thus rebuffed by the clerk, turned upon his heels and began a survey of the apartment and its occupants. He almost immediately perceived Annette, and no sooner had he done so, than he hastened towards her, hat in hand. "You here!" he exclaimed, evidently greatly disturbed.

"Why not?" replied the girl, smiling. "Do you fancy that I am rich, or do you think the worse of me because I am sometimes obliged to solicit help off—my uncle?"

"Neither, mademoiselle; only I am distressed to see that you are even temporarily embarrassed, and I assure you that if I can be of any service——"

"But you can't; and even if you could, I should not accept your aid, as you know very well," replied Annette, gaily. "Besides, don't be alarmed, I have not come to borrow. On the contrary, I have come to repay a loan contracted in the hard times preceding the January quarter-day."

"It was the same with me. I had to raise money for my rent. I have to pay two hundred and fifty francs for a room on the sixth floor of a house in the Rue Ordener. You can see it from here. I don't live in furnished rooms, but when I move, I can easily transport all my household furniture in a hand-cart."

"We are neighbours, then, for my brother and I live in the Rue Labat."

"What would you say if I told you that I am a little afraid of your brother?"

"Indeed! And why?"

"He is too quiet and too eminently respectable to fancy a Bohemian like myself."

"He is obliged to be a little circumspect, as he is employed in a banking-house; but he would much prefer to be a Bohemian like you; and if he succeeds in finding a theatre to take the play he has nearly completed he will not hesitate to give up a situation that does not at all suit his tastes. Besides, he does like you very much, and you certainly can have no better proof of it than the fact that he suggested the visit to the museum next Sunday. Was it on account of this visit that you wish to redeem your best coat?" inquired Mademoiselle Brunier, with difficulty repressing a strong desire to laugh.

"What! do you know?"

"Certainly, I heard you. You shouted out your request loud enough, I'm sure."

"Well, an honest confession is good for the soul, you know; so I might as well admit it. But pray, don't take me for a coxcomb because I want to look fine on Sunday. The fact is, it is the only respectable coat I possess, and it has been in pawn so long that it really ought to be almost as good as new. I could not accompany you in an old sack coat, so I did not hesitate to commit an act of profanation to regain possession of my black coat."

"An act of profanation!" repeated the girl, anxiously, for she was not a little alarmed.

"Yes, I have degraded my art. You see, a pork-dealer offered me forty francs to model him a hog out of melted fat for his shop window. I refused, with scorn, at first, but I have just consented. He paid me twenty francs in advance, and in three days' time my work will delight all the loafers in the neighbourhood; but I have stipulated that my name is not to be affixed to the statue."

This strange explanation restored Annette's spirits. She burst into a hearty laugh in the very face of her admirer, who exclaimed: "I hope you won't betray me. If your brother learnt that I worked for butchers——"

"I can attend to you now," called out one of the clerks.

"Pray go first, mademoiselle," said Carnac, politely.

Annette needed no urging. She rose to approach the desk, and Carnac had the delicacy not to follow her too closely; indeed, while she was waiting for the clerk to calculate the amount of interest due on the loan, he occupied himself with scrutinising the persons in front of the opposite counter. A woman who was still young, and poorly, though decently, clad, was arguing with one of the appraisers who refused to lend her more than five francs upon a gold ring. She wanted fifteen. There was too much of a difference in their estimates for them to be able to arrive at any understanding, so he returned the article to her, and she turned away with drooping head. Poverty often makes people selfish, and not one of the needy persons present paid any attention to her. Such scenes take place every day, and the bystanders had witnessed many of them. Carnac, however, looked at the woman, and saw that she was weeping. He was a physiognomist, and being also well acquainted with Parisian life, he instantly guessed this poor creature's story. He followed her for a mo-

ment, and then asked, in a low tone: "It is your wedding ring, is it not?"

The woman, who was greatly surprised, glanced up at him with wondering eyes, and faltered: "Yes, sir, but——"

"But your husband has deserted you. How many children have you?"

"Two; but——"

"They are too young to work, no doubt, and there is no one to provide for them but yourself. Your rent is unpaid, and your landlord threatens to turn you out of doors. The children will have to sleep in the street, which is not a very comfortable resting-place in the month of January."

"There is the Seine left," said the poor woman, in a hoarse voice.

"That is even less attractive. You had better try something else."

"I am tired of trying. My children have had nothing to eat since yesterday. The five francs he offered me would keep them alive for a week, but after that, what would become of them? I can get no work."

"What is your business?"

"I used to do Berlin wool work for some large shops, but I have sunk so low that no one will trust me with the wool now, and I have no money to buy any."

"Perhaps I can obtain some employment for you," said Carnac, thinking of Camille, who was always ready to assist in any charitable work. "Where do you live?"

"At the corner of the Rue de Puebla and the Boulevard de la Villette, but I shall not be there any longer than to-night."

"Oh, I understand, you have no money, and your hard-hearted landlord is going to turn you out. It is nothing to him if your children perish of cold. Well, I don't intend that they shall die. Come to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock, and ask for Jean Carnac, at the house of Monsieur Gerfaut, No. 99 Boulevard des Batignolles. You will receive an order for some work, and all the materials necessary to execute it."

"Oh, sir, if you do this for me you will save my children's lives!"

"Oh, I shan't do it. As I only have some cane-bottomed chairs in my apartment, I am in no special need of tapestry work. But I know a young lady who will take pleasure in assisting you, and, in the meantime, here is a coin to buy something for the children," and Carnac slipped the butcher's gold napoleon into the woman's hand. "How much does your rent amount to?"

"Ten francs, sir, and if you will lend me that amount on this ring I will take it, but I can't accept alms."

"It is not alms; you can return the money from your first earnings. Ten francs, too, won't be enough, as you owe that already. What would you live upon from now until to-morrow? Pocket the money, I say, and go and buy some bread and soup for the young ones." The woman attempted to expostulate, but Carnac pushed her toward the door, saying: "Come, come, no nonsense! I have plenty of money just now, and the loan won't inconvenience me in the least. You shall work on a pretty ottoman for my wife when I begin house-keeping."

As soon as he disposed of her, he returned to Annette, who had just finished her business with the clerk. "Well, it is accomplished," she said, gaily. "I shall have my ear-rings to-morrow, for I, too, want to look fine on Sunday. It is your turn now."

"No," stammered Carnac, "I have changed my mind. My pork-

butcher still owes me twenty francs ; I will take him his pig to-morrow afternoon, and after that there will be plenty of time to redeem my coat."

Annette had been furtively watching him while he talked with the woman, and she understood the situation. "While you are about it," said she, "why don't you confess that your money has gone into the pocket of a poor woman who needed it to keep her from perishing of hunger?"

"I would rather confess something else—that I love you, for instance, mademoiselle ; but I am obliged to admit that I have indulged in the luxury of a charitable action. The woman will call on Mademoiselle Gerfaut to-morrow, and I hope you will persuade your friend to patronise her."

"Gladly, sir, and I am deeply grateful to you for having aided her. Now that I know how truly good you are, if your pork-butcher played you false, I will walk up the street on your arm even if you have to wear a blouse."

"It shan't be, mademoiselle, I assure you. I will have my coat even if I am obliged to manufacture another pig of the same kind. It would be a sacrifice, I admit, but it would not be paying too dearly for the happiness of spending a day with you."

"Thanks for the compliment. I must leave you now, however, unless you would like to escort me to the boulevard where my brother is waiting for me."

"Oh, no," said Carnac, hastily. "I am too shabbily clad ; besides, I have business here, you know."

As he spoke, he opened the door and stepped back to allow Annette to pass out ; but instead of advancing, the girl touched him lightly on the arm, as much as to say, "Look !" In the passage a lady who had evidently just emerged from the private room reserved for privileged applicants, was proceeding slowly towards the outer door. She held in her hand one of the pasteboard boxes in which the clerks of the Mont-de-Piété deposit jewellery for safe-keeping, and she was so deeply engaged in taking an inventory of its contents that she passed on without noticing either Annette or Carnac. They both recognised her, however, and the student of nature hastily closed the inner door. "What ! has she any business here?" he asked ; "a great singer who has just returned from Russia laden with roubles. That looks very strange. Madame de Carouge seems to me a suspicious character, and I begin to think that Graindorge is right after all."

"She seems to me also to be a suspicious character," said Annette, "but not because she visits the Mont-de-Piété ; for we frequent it as well."

"Yes, but we are not rich, mademoiselle," replied Carnac, hastily, "while Madame de Carouge——"

"But she has not always been rich, perhaps. Before going to Russia, where she accumulated a fortune, she was probably obliged to pawn her jewels. Artistes are not always rolling in gold, as you know very well. So it is only natural that on arriving in Paris, she should, without delay, redeem——"

"Her mother's cross—that is the article which usually figures in melodramas. But she has had ample time to redeem her jewels a dozen times over since she began giving concerts in St. Petersburg. If you had heard what Graindorge says about her, you would distrust her as much as I do."

"What ! does he know her ?"

"He isn't sure, but he declares that she strongly resembles a woman

named Margot, a rather disreputable character who used to frequent the low public balls, and who had a scar on her face."

"Madame de Carouge's first name is Marguerite."

"Marguerite and Margot are the same."

"But there is no scar on her face."

"I am not so sure about that," said Carnac, shaking his head. "I haven't seen her near enough yet. Besides, she is thoroughly acquainted with the art of making herself up. But I shall catch her one of these days, see if I don't, for if she is really Margot, I know where to find her."

"I hope Madame de Carouge has nothing in common with the creature you speak of, as she seems likely to be a frequent visitor at Monsieur Gerfaut's. But I think we are devoting a little too much time to her. My brother must be getting impatient."

"I will detain you no longer, mademoiselle," said Carnac, re-opening the door which he had closed to prevent Madame de Carouge from seeing them. Annette passed out first, and the student of nature followed her into the passage leading to the Rue Fromentin. A single gas jet was burning dimly in this corridor which could be used alike by those who transacted business in the public office and in the private room. Just as Mademoiselle Brunier turned to shake hands with him before departing, Carnac stepped upon something hard, and stooped to pick it up. "Look," said he, holding it up in the dim light to examine it, "a ring!"

"Perhaps the poor woman you helped dropped it?"

"No; she came to pawn a plain gold ring, a wedding ring, and this is a gentleman's signet ring."

"No matter, it evidently belongs to some one who lost it on leaving the establishment, and you had better give it to the head clerk, as the owner will undoubtedly return to claim it."

"That is more than probable, for here is the pasteboard box the owner of the ring threw on the pavement. It is probable that in transferring the articles from the box to his pocket he dropped the ring in the passage."

"But suppose the owner should prove to be Madame de Carouge, the great singer—she just went out, you recollect, with a box in her hand; in fact, no one has passed through the passage since. It seems to me almost certain that she was the person who dropped it, for if it had been lying on the floor any length of time, some one would have seen it, and kept it, probably."

"But fortunately it has fallen into honest hands. Madame de Carouge must set great store by it, as she came to redeem it in person."

"If she does, it cannot be on account of its intrinsic value. The stone is an amethyst—which is not at all expensive, you know. There is a coat-of-arms cut upon it, however."

"Monsieur de Carouge's coat-of-arms, I suppose."

"Is there a Monsieur de Carouge? Madame Stenay neglected to tell us, on introducing her friend."

"Because her friend is a widow, probably."

"Possibly, though I am strongly inclined to think that this *prima donna* has never been married, and as for her claims to noble birth, I am under the impression that her family does not date from the Crusades."

"But that is no reason for keeping her ring."

"I have no desire to keep it; but I am not sorry to have an opportunity of restoring it to its owner in person."

"What! You are anxious to pay this lady a visit?" exclaimed Mademoiselle Brunier, rather dubiously.

"Yes, for the very good reason that I may thus learn several things which I greatly desire to know; for instance, where she obtained the ticket which she was obliged to produce in order to redeem this article of masculine adornment."

"She won't tell you; more than that, she will probably be very angry with you for asking her such a question. What business have you to meddle with her affairs?"

"I will devise some excuse, and as she met me in Monsieur Gerfaut's studio she won't dare to show me the door. I know where she lives. She gave her address to my employer in my presence, and if I announce that I have called at the request of my illustrious master, I shall be admitted."

As they talked, Carnac and Annette were slowly ascending the Rue Fromentin, which chanced to be deserted at that moment.

"Do you care anything about my approval?" asked Annette, suddenly.

"How can you ask such a question?" exclaimed Carnac. "Why, I would rather hew stones till the end of my days than do anything that would displease you."

"Then you will renounce this strange scheme, and follow my advice by immediately placing this ring in the hands of the clerk who just exchanged it for a pawn-ticket."

"As you please, mademoiselle, only permit me to examine it more closely before returning it. The light in the corridor was too dim for me to be able to see the device plainly, but here I shall have no difficulty, I think, in deciphering it; I know little or nothing about heraldry, but I should like to see the armorial bearings of this friend of Madame Marguerite—or possibly Margot."

"You still harbour the same suspicions, then? Really you are very tenacious in your opinions."

"Yes, when I think I am right. Let us examine this escutcheon a little. Look at this shield with its lines, some of which run cross-ways and others up and down. What colour do they represent? Ah, I recollect, it is sable, black—a black ground, as they say. I have a friend—an engraver, who told me about all this foolishness—and in the corner there are three birds, two above and one below—eagles, parrots, or cuckoos, as you please. I think, however, that they are eagles, as they have claws and curved beaks, and above the shield there is a count's coronet, mademoiselle."

"It matters very little whether it be the coronet of a count or a marquis, it seems to me."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle. Monsieur de Charny is a count."

"Monsieur de Charny!" repeated the girl, who was beginning to divine Carnac's meaning. "Can it be that you suspect——"

"That the count is much better acquainted with Madame de Carouge than he pretends to be."

"There is nothing to prove that such is the case, however."

"No; it is a mere fancy on my part, but I am not sorry to have an opportunity of investigating the matter. It is for this reason that I am so anxious to call upon the lady; for recollect, mademoiselle, Monsieur de Charny is soon to marry your friend, and if I discover that this singer has any claims upon him, it would be as well for Mademoiselle Gerfaut to know it without delay."

"I should be the first to warn her, but you have only some vague suspicions; the title of count is borne by a great many men, and you are not even sure that this ring was lost by Madame de Carouge."

"That is why I should like to satisfy myself on the point, and if you will consent it shall be done to-morrow. There are count's coronets in plenty, that is true ; but each nobleman, whether his rank is the genuine article or not, has armorial bearings peculiar to himself, and it will not take me long to discover Monsieur de Charny's coat-of-arms. Should it prove to be the same as that engraved upon this ring—but wait a moment—here is a motto, but it is difficult to decipher it, the letters are so small." And Carnac, after several fruitless efforts, finally abandoned the attempt altogether. "It is a pity," he muttered. "If I could only keep the ring until to-morrow, I should be able to find out what the motto is ; but if I return it this evening, I can hardly request the clerk to lend me a magnifying glass to examine the article ; besides, a few moments' conversation with Madame de Carouge might afford me some very valuable information."

Annette remained silent, and, Carnac, after vainly waiting several seconds for some comment, remarked : "I am waiting for your orders, mademoiselle."

"My orders ? Why, I have none to give."

"Then you will allow me to act as I think advisable in the matter ?"

"Most assuredly. Had I found this ring, I should not have kept it a moment, but I did not find it."

"Will you forgive me if I persist in my plan of showing it to Madame de Carouge ? If it does not belong to her, I will turn it over to the nearest commissary of police."

"If it belongs to the Count de Charny why didn't he come to redeem it himself, instead of applying to this lady to do so for him ?"

"That is precisely what I wish to know, on Mademoiselle Gerfaut's account ; not on my own, understand."

Annette reflected for a few moments, and then said quietly : "I am sure I can trust you, sir. Do as you think best."

"Thank you, thank you, mademoiselle," exclaimed Carnac, greatly relieved. "Will you come to the studio to-morrow ? Pray do so, for I am almost certain that I shall have some news for you. Now you will excuse me, I am sure, if I leave you. I dare not appear before your brother in this costume. He might be offended with me for venturing to speak to you."

The girl's only reply was to give him her hand once more, and then walk rapidly away. Carnac watched her until she turned the corner of the street, and then slipping the ring into his pocket, he muttered : "Now, Margot, my friend, we will see which of us comes off conqueror !"

### III.

THE tavern where Jean Carnac had invited Graindorge to meet him, was on the Boulevard Rochechouart near the Elysée Montmartre. It was one of those peculiar establishments which abound in that quarter of Paris, and which are usually styled *caboulots* by their patrons. They are not exactly restaurants, though people eat there ; nor wine-shops, though people drink there ; beer and absinthe being greatly in demand. Still the distinguishing feature of the *caboulot* is the large room in the rear, where there is always a dilapidated billiard table, and some wooden benches where intoxicated customers can sleep without danger of being disturbed. Each *caboulot* has its *habitués*, who do not, by any means, belong to what

are commonly called the higher classes. Some of these places have become literary resorts, where young students meet for debate and speech-making. Here the daylight only penetrates through stained-glass windows, and realistic poems are recited by the hour at the top of the authors' voices. Others are frequented by persons who are not at all particular as to the quality of the tippie, provided the landlord does not refuse them credit, or insist upon their being well-dressed; others, again, serve as meeting-places for malefactors of every sort, fugitives from justice, and ruffians of the vilest kind. These last establishments are closely watched by the police, who only tolerate them because they often manage to effect difficult arrests there.

The *caboulot* which Carnac honoured with his patronage was one of those where artists assembled for the discussion of æsthetical subjects, emptying innumerable glasses of beer the while. But it was the occasional resort of the petty shopkeepers of the neighbourhood, who met there to play a game of backgammon or dominoes; however, the artistic fraternity was greatly in the majority.

Old Barbizon, who kept the establishment, had been a professional model in his time, so he knew all the daubers of the vicinity, and was prodigal in his attentions. He relegated the philistines of the middle classes to obscure corners, confined the bellicose loafers within the limits of the billiard-room, and even put them out of doors when they annoyed his favourites, who were always sure of finding plenty of elbow-room, and unlimited credit into the bargain. Carnac had been his idol ever since presenting him with a head of the republic, most original in design, and which Barbizon had placed over the counter, where he sat enthroned behind a row of bottles and decanters. Nearly all the time that Carnac did not pass at the studio was spent here, where he enjoyed the utmost freedom; finding plenty of admiring listeners, moreover, whenever he felt inclined to discourse grandiloquently upon art. Even the philistines, though they understood little or nothing that he said, listened as if they thought him an oracle.

That evening he made his appearance considerably earlier than usual, and rather more carefully dressed, for, on leaving Mademoiselle Brunier, he had returned home to don—not the famous black frock-coat, for that was still lying on the shelves of the pawnshop—but a fairly respectable garment which he only wore when he went to balls—to public balls, of course, for he did not frequent the social gatherings to which a man is admitted only in a dress coat and a white cravat. Graindorge, clad in civilian's dress, had met him at the appointed hour. They had tried beverages of divers kinds with their sauerkraut, and now sat drinking and smoking their pipes. Old Barbizon had condescended to sit down beside them for a few moments, and the conversation showed no signs of flagging, for Margot was the subject of it. "She was altogether a mysterious character," remarked Barbizon. "She was the best dancer in all the public balls round about here, and she must have had plenty of money, for she was always standing treat to a parcel of queer characters. Strange, too, she talked like a real lady when she chose. Ah! I lost a good customer when she disappeared."

"She will come back again, perhaps."

"I don't count upon it. She disappeared at the close of the carnival season in the year '75. Even if she is still alive, she isn't young any longer, and she has probably settled down."

"But if you met her you would hardly fail to recognise her, I suppose."

"Oh, I should know her right enough. She can't hide her scar, you know."

"My friend Graindorge here says that it was scarcely perceptible."

"He is very much mistaken, then. In the morning, after she had been carousing all night, you could see it as plainly as the nose on a man's face."

"The most astonishing thing to me," said Carnac, laying down his pipe, "is that the fellows she treated so often don't know what has become of her."

"They may know, but I hardly think so. The fact is, although she drank and caroused with them, she kept them at a distance; and if any of them got too familiar, she treated them as if they had been her valets. When she tired of them, she just left them here or anywhere, without telling them whether she intended to come back or not."

"But have you seen none of them since she decamped?"

"The fact is, I never pay attention to such vermin. In the first place, I hardly need tell you that they generally come here dressed up in fancy costumes, and they look so different from what they do when they are running about the streets in the daytime that I may have waited on them again and again without recognising them."

"Still, it's strange that you haven't seen a single one of them."

"Well, I am almost sure that I did see one of them only last week—the one who always personated the bride in carnival time, because he had a long black beard, and a hooked nose. You can imagine how absurd such a man must have looked with a wreath of orange-blossoms and a low-necked dress. I remembered his face well, and the other morning, at about two o'clock, just as I was shutting up, he came in and asked for a glass of brandy. I don't like the fellow, but I gave him what he wanted all the same, for I saw he was about played out. I don't know what he had been up to, but he looked as if he were ready to drop, and he was puffing like an ox."

"What night was it?"

"I have forgotten now, but it was about a week ago."

"Did you ask him anything about Margot?"

"No, indeed. It is so long since I saw the woman that I had almost forgotten her; and if you hadn't mentioned her name, I doubt if I should ever have thought of her again."

"I had almost forgotten her also," remarked Graindorge, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation.

"Still, you saw a woman to-day who strongly resembled Margot, didn't you, old fellow?" asked Carnac.

"She certainly looked like her. But one is liable to be mistaken, of course."

Just then the door opened to admit a man, attired in a grotesque costume, with long boots that reached up his thighs, and his face daubed with red paint like a circus clown.

"A glass of rum," he ordered in a harsh voice, as he made his way to the other end of the room.

"Very well, sir," replied a waiter, who was serving four evil-looking billiard-players.

"Dear me," said old Barbizon, after a searching glance at the newcomer, "this is certainly a case of 'Speak of the devil,' you know what I mean."

"What?" inquired Graindorge, eagerly. "Is the man who just entered——"

"Why, yes; he's my customer of the other night—the former bride of Margot's band. He has changed his costume, but he can't change his nose, and besides, he hasn't cut off his beard. It is the same fellow. There is a ball at the Elysée Montmartre this evening, and he has come to get a drink before going there."

"The others are, perhaps, waiting for him on the boulevard," said Carnac.

"No; they would have come in a body, but it is evident that Margot is no longer here to manage the unruly set. However, I must return to the counter now. Customers will be coming in fast, and I shall have to attend to them."

"Eleven o'clock!" exclaimed Graindorge, as the landlord rose to leave them. "Time passes very quickly in your company, Monsieur Carnac. I should like to remain with you until to-morrow morning, but I must resume my duties at midnight, and I shall first of all be obliged to return home and change my clothes."

"Go at once, without any ceremony. I shall perhaps see you again at the ball," said Carnac, who wished to be alone in order to watch Margot's former companion at his leisure.

The man had seated himself at a table near to that occupied by Carnac, who saw that the fellow had a most unprepossessing aspect, rendered still more forbidding by a thick, unkempt beard, and a nose which made him look not unlike some bird of prey. The young sculptor was stealthily scrutinising this unpleasing specimen of humanity, when a rap on the glass door behind him attracted his attention. The man with the hooked nose had evidently not heard the sound, for he did not move. He had just lighted a short pipe, and this accessory made him look even more repulsive than before. From time to time he glanced at the billiard-room, which had a private entrance from the boulevard. It was quite evident that he was acquainted with none of the players who were driving the balls about over the ragged baize, but it was equally certain that he was expecting somebody. Carnac awaited no one, and yet he felt extremely anxious to see the person who was tapping on the glass to announce his presence. The only three persons in this part of the establishment were the student of nature himself, the man with the hooked nose, and the landlord; now, the signal was evidently intended for one of the three, and probably for the new comer who was smoking in a corner at some little distance from the door.

"What if it should be Margot?" said Carnac to himself. "How can I find out? The person is behind me, whoever it is, and if I turn I shall surely be recognised—that is, if Margot be Madame de Carouge, as I suspect."

The tapping was soon repeated, with no better success than before. Old Barbizon continued nodding behind his counter, and the man in the corner went on puffing out thick clouds of smoke. Finally, however, the door opened, and a woman whom Carnac instantly recognised entered the restaurant. "It is the same woman I met in the pawnshop!" he muttered, pulling his felt hat down over his eyes. "The good-for nothing creature! she keeps nice company! Ah, well, this is not the first time I have been deceived. She will make my money fly, and no mistake. Catch me believing in any more mothers of starving children!"

But he had been rash in his judgment, as he soon perceived. The

woman went straight to the table at which the man with the hooked nose sat smoking, with his hands in his pockets and his head resting against the wall. Stopping in front of him, she called: "Adrien!"

"Eh, what?" he growled, straightening himself up.

But no sooner had he set his eyes upon the woman who had just called him by name, then he exclaimed: "What, Moumoute! Is it you?"

"Yes, it's I. I've changed a good deal, have I not? But I find you at last!"

"What did you come here for? What do you want with me?"

"What do I want? I want you to give me some money to buy food for your children, who are starving."

"Money! Well, you have plenty of cheek, you have! Besides, what makes you think that I have any money?"

"You must have some or you would not have hired a costume to go to a masked ball."

"I didn't pay for it with my money," said the man, cynically.

"I know very well that you paid for it with mine, as you have taken all that I possessed from me. For two long years, I have suffered uncomplainingly, and if I were alone in the world I should not apply to you, but the children are without food."

"Send them to the foundling asylum, then."

The woman turned pale, and Carnac, who was furtively watching her, saw a big tear roll down her cheek. "Listen, Adrien," she said, in a voice husky with emotion, "since you deserted us I have asked you for nothing. I have not even tried to find out where you were, or what you were doing, though I was tolerably well satisfied in my own mind; but this evening, while passing this place where you used to spend all the money I could earn, the idea of looking in at the window occurred to me, and seeing you here I tapped on the window to attract your attention, but you did not seem to hear me."

"If I had heard you, and known it was you, I should have gone out and have settled with you, you may depend on it," said the wretch, giving her a look of unmistakable meaning.

"You would have beaten me, or killed me, you mean! Ah, well, it is not too late. You would be sent to prison for it, and your children would have to beg in the streets; but as for me, my sufferings would be over."

"Enough of such bosh! I haven't a penny. Get out; I shan't follow you. You needn't be afraid of that. I have no desire to get myself into trouble on your account; but if you bother me again, you will be sorry for it."

This conversation had begun in rather subdued tones, the poor woman evincing no desire to take the people present into her confidence, and the scoundrel to whom she appealed having other reasons for avoiding an open scandal. Besides, old Barbizon would not hesitate to interfere if the quarrel seemed likely to become serious. "I won't go without some money," replied the woman, firmly.

The man raised his clenched fist; but he dared not strike. Others were watching him, so he repressed his rage, though not without an evident effort, and said, more graciously: "You certainly are a torment. One would think I was rolling in gold instead of having only three or four five-franc pieces in my breeches pocket. Well, I will consent to divide, for the sake of getting rid of you. Come out on the boulevard a minute."

He was on the point of rising to settle his score at the counter, and

Carnac was preparing to follow him, for he had resolved not to leave the woman from whom he hoped to obtain valuable information at this brute's mercy. "She will come to Gerfaut's house to-morrow for the work I have promised her," he said to himself, "and I can then persuade her to tell me everything. I can ascertain the name of her scoundrel of a husband, and possibly she may have heard him speak of Margot. I was wrong just now; a good deed is never lost. I evidently invested the butcher's twenty francs to good advantage; but if I am not much mistaken, this charming Adrien intends to murder his wife in the street. No, you don't, you rascal! I shall be on hand to prevent it. I am not wanting in muscle, and, if necessary, I can call the police."

Carnac would have carried his plan into execution had not his friend Barbizon spared him the trouble. He knew that a member of Margot's former band was capable of any crime, and so, leaving the counter, he placed one hand upon the shoulder of the woman, while he forced the husband back into his chair with the other one. "Run away now, my good woman," he said, in his coarse, though rather good-natured voice. "I will have no quarrelling in my establishment. Your husband shan't molest you here; it would create a scandal, and I won't have any in my establishment; nor shall he molest you in the street, for the very good reason that he won't leave here without my permission. So go home, and go quietly to bed, and settle your difficulties in private next time."

The poor woman turned to go. As she did so, she perceived Carnac, whom she instantly recognised. Her first impulse apparently was to ask for his protection, but the student of nature placed his finger warningly on his lips. The man did not see this gesture, but the woman did, and understood it. "Very well; I will go," she said. "Your children shall know how much you care for them."

"I can stand that, I guess," the degraded creature growled in reply.

Barbizon cut these tender farewells short. Taking the woman by the arm, he led her to the door, which he closed behind her, after pushing her gently into the street. Carnac felt strongly tempted to strangle the wretch who thus squandered his money at a café while his wife and children were starving, but he was obliged to conceal this inclination, for he did not mean to let the man go until he had tried to obtain some information from him; in fact, he even had the courage to refer to the scene he had witnessed in the hope of conciliating the wretch and making his acquaintance.

"Does she often go for you in that style?" he inquired, laughing, as he left his seat to approach the incensed husband.

"No, it is the first time; and she had better not try it again. I held in on your account, but I will get even with her yet."

"I think I did well not to marry," remarked Carnac. "Wives are not pleasant property to have when funds run low; and when they meddle with matters that don't concern them a man certainly has a right to give them a lesson. As if a man hadn't a right to enjoy himself a little occasionally!"

"She certainly won't prevent me from enjoying myself. I say, Barbizon, give me a glass of something strong to brace me up again."

"Three glasses!" exclaimed Carnac, taking a seat opposite Adrien at the same table. "I will pay for them."

"As you please," said Adrien. "I don't refuse a favour when I have the money to return it," and he slapped his trousers pocket as he spoke.

"You shall return it. You look to me like a good sort of fellow. You are going to the Elysée ball, I judge, and so am I. How does it happen that your friends are not with you?"

"What friends?"

"Those who were with you when you danced at carnival time, dressed like a bride."

"Did you ever see me do that?"

"A dozen times, old fellow. I used to attend all the public balls. When Margot was there we enjoyed ourselves better than we do now."

"Margot! Do you know Margot?" cried the man.

"That is to say, I did know her," replied Carnac, "or, rather, only by sight, for I never spoke to her."

"What Margot do you mean?" inquired Adrien, who had already had time to recover from his surprise, and who evidently regretted having committed himself. "The little red-haired laundress of the Rue des Martyrs, who is always at the Reine Blanche balls?"

"Oh, no; the other one; the one who had a scar on her face, and who used to astonish everybody at the Elysée Montmartre."

"I don't remember her."

"Nonsense. You always danced in the set with her, and whenever you were her partner you took the company by storm. What has become of her?"

"I've no idea. Do you suppose I pay any attention to hussies who display themselves at public balls? I dance with them, of course, but when the carnival's over, I trouble myself no more about them. They can go where they like; it makes no difference to me."

"I don't suppose it does," said Barbizon, "but, my boy, Margot was no ordinary person; and she paid for your drinks so often that you ought not to forget her. She spent more money in a single evening than all the rest of you spend in three months; but now she has gone away. Has she returned that you are out in gala dress again, for you, too, have been invisible? It is strange that your wife should have happened to catch you this evening, when you haven't set foot here before for several years. When you dropped in the other night, about five minutes before I put up the shutters, I scarcely recognised you."

"The other night! I don't know what you mean."

"Don't feign innocence. You will have to cut off your beard and change the shape of your nose, if you don't want me to recognise you, old fellow! What was the matter with you that night? You looked like a man who had been running to escape from the police."

"Nonsense! I had just come down the Rue du Moulin de la Galette on the run, and was a little out of breath. I'm not afraid of the police. No one has any cause to complain of me. But my friends don't make their appearance, and I am only losing time here."

"What, you are going?" exclaimed Carnac. "Why, it isn't midnight yet."

"That makes no difference; I must go all the same. Here is a twenty-franc piece, Barbizon; come, take what I owe you out of it," said the fellow, rising and throwing upon the table a gold coin which he had drawn from his pocket where it had plenty of company, in spite of his assurances to his wife.

This hasty departure did not suit Carnac's plans, for he was anxious to talk further with this rascal about Margot. Still, what good would it do?

The man was already on his guard, and Gerfaunt's pupil could hardly hope to obtain any valuable information from him. To insist would certainly increase his distrust, so Carnac decided it would be better to let the man go off, and then follow him to the ball, where he could watch him and his acquaintances. Besides, he could hardly fail to see the woman he had befriended on the following day, and she certainly would not refuse to tell him her unworthy husband's real name and history.

Adrien had resumed his helmet, which was adorned with a gigantic plume, and went off without saying a word to Carnac, whom he no longer regarded with a favourable eye since the allusions to Margot. However, the young sculptor followed the fellow closely, for he wished to satisfy himself that the woman was no longer within the miscreant's reach. He had the satisfaction of seeing that she had not waited for him, and that Adrien wended his way straight to the ball-room, which was only a short distance from Barbizon's. He even saw him enter it; but before following in the same direction, he decided to take a short walk up and down the street in order to freshen his ideas. Fortune had befriended him in a remarkable manner since he had left the studio. The unexpected discovery of Madame de Carouge at the Mont-de-Piété, the meeting with one of Margot's old friends at Barbizon's, the finding of the ring at the door of the pawnshop—all these incidents recurred to his mind, and he endeavoured to draw some logical conclusions from them. He had not left the precious ring at home; first, because the drawers of his dilapidated furniture would not lock, and secondly, because he had a vague presentiment that he might use it to advantage, even before he presented himself at the residence of the great singer who had recently arrived from Russia. He had therefore placed it on the little finger of his left hand, where it had attracted the attention of old Barbizon, who had made this unaccustomed adornment the subject of numerous questions which our student of nature had cleverly evaded.

He had fully decided to go to the ball, and if this mysterious woman Margot should appear there during the night, he was resolved to watch her closely, and even to engage her in conversation, invoking, if necessary, the assistance of Graindorge in solving this question of identity which interested him so deeply. The execution of this plan was only attended by one difficulty. If the old band which had been scattered during so many years assembled anew that evening, the man with the hooked nose would probably resume the place he had filled so brilliantly in former times. Now, this fellow Adrien had met him at Barbizon's, and would surely recognise him; besides, he already distrusted him, and would do so even more on seeing him again at the ball. So he would probably warn Margot of Carnac's presence, and in that case how could the latter engage in conversation with her or mingle with her merry companions?

The young fellow was already beginning to fear that his plan would prove a failure, when a sudden inspiration came to him. He had just passed a shop kept by a dealer in second-hand clothing, a woman of whom he had often purchased stuffs to drape his models. She also let out masquerade costumes on hire, and a number of these were now hanging in her shop window.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to disguise myself?" thought Carnac. "Mother Langoumois will trust me. She is like Barbizon; she adores artists. I shall have no trouble in finding all the requisites for a complete

disguise among her collection. I know how to make up my face in an unrecognisable fashion, and I would bet the Venus of Milo against a china dog that Adrien won't even suspect who I am."

And thereupon, as the student of nature generally obeyed his first impulse, he entered the shop without further deliberation.

"What, is this you, you young scapegrace?" gaily exclaimed Madame Langoumois, a stout, good-natured woman who had been very lively in her youth, and who was still as obliging as Beranger's Madame Gregoire. "Are you going to have a little fun to-night? Yes? Then, what costume will you have?"

"Show me what you have on hand," replied Carnac. "You know very well that I am not going as a musketeer or a Spanish grandee; I should like to have something rather grotesque. I wish I could dress myself here."

"That can be easily managed; you have only to go into the back shop and take your choice. You will find all sorts of things there—coats of mail, top boots, doublets, wigs, powder and rouge, and plenty of Japanese goods at fifteen francs a yard. If you were not an old customer I wouldn't leave you there alone to dress."

"Well, close the door and leave me to myself. You will keep my clothes for me until to-morrow morning, won't you? and I am sure you won't refuse to trust me until the end of the week."

"Your business isn't prospering, then?"

"Not my regular business. I don't make much headway in that; but I am working for the pork-butchers now, and that pays pretty well. Besides, old Gerfaut will advance me a month's pay whenever I want it. I have a five-franc piece in my pocket to pay for my admission and treat the ladies, so if you will be kind enough to trust me I shall do very well. Go back to the shop now, please; I want to make my toilet."

The good-natured dame returned to the shop to wait for the customers who so rarely came, and some twenty minutes afterwards Carnac appeared before her completely transformed. His body was encased in flesh-coloured tights, and he wore the leather leggings and gaudily-embroidered moccasins of an American Indian, with a jaguar-skin falling over his shoulders. His face was daubed with paint in the most startling fashion. His forehead was coloured blue, his chin red, and his cheeks red, white, and blue. He was certainly frightful to behold, and entirely unrecognisable. In fact, Madame Langoumois nearly swooned with terror on beholding him: but he calmed her fears, and after taking an affectionate leave of her, stepped out upon the boulevard.

Around the brilliantly-lighted entrance of the Elysée Montmartre there was a crowd of vehicles, porters, collectors of cigar-stumps, and loafers who had congregated there to see the motley throng ascend the broad flight of steps leading to the ball-room. The student of nature was tall and strong, and he soon elbowed his way through the crowd, paid his admission fee, and entered the hall, an immense apartment, with a mass of artificial rocks, which served as a platform for the orchestra, at one end of it. On either side stretched long refreshment tables, and in the rear, to the right, there was a café, where those who did not dance usually preferred to stay. The orchestra was playing a lively polka, and innumerable couples were whirling round the room, which was filled with a dense cloud of tobacco smoke.

The first person Carnac beheld on entering the hall was Graindorge.

He had resumed his uniform, and was now standing near the doorway, with his comrade, Colache, beside him. Carnac paused directly opposite him, and assumed sundry grotesque attitudes which elicited a surly: "Move on!" from Colache; but Graindorge only laughed, without addressing a word to this savage from beyond the seas. The experiment was satisfactory. If Graindorge did not recognise Carnac, it was because the latter was unrecognisable. Emboldened by the success of his first attempt, the young sculptor advanced a little further, until he saw the man with the helmet leaning against a pillar, with his eyes fixed on the door. "He is waiting for his companions," thought Carnac. "I came just in time."

The concluding strains of the polka had died away, and a young man was just hanging on the rock a card bearing the word "Quadrille," printed in large capitals. "Now is the time to show my proficiency," said Carnac to himself. "The main thing is to find a partner with whom I can do myself justice."

There were partners in plenty, for all the laundresses, professional models, and *grisettes* of the neighbourhood seemed to have congregated there that night; there were even plenty of honest, industrious young girls of the poorer classes, who had come there to enjoy themselves, under the guardianship of their parents, comfortably seated in the gallery. The costumes were generally of doubtful freshness, and by no means expensive. A gay band sewed on a flannel petticoat, or a pair of trousers borrowed from a brother or lover is all that is needed to make a very presentable milkmaid or urchin at the Elysée Montmartre. Carnac selected a tall girl, attired in an exceedingly youthful fashion, whom he had just seen dancing the polka with a liveliness and spirit that promised well. He fancied he had met her before at some of the public balls which he often patronised when he had a five-franc piece to spare, but he did not fear recognition, so he invited her to be his partner with the high-flown, mocking politeness which is in vogue in such places, and she, charmed by his striking costume, enthusiastically accepted, and even undertook to find a second couple to complete the set. "Here, Adrien," she cried, in a shrill voice, "come and help us make up a dance." But the man with the helmet shook his head, and started towards the door. "Go along, then, you old muff!" sneered the girl. "We can do without you, I guess."

The clash of cymbals resounded through the hall, and the signal was greeted with shouts of delight. The quadrilles rapidly formed, and Carnac, fearing he might lose an opportunity of distinguishing himself, took the first place that was offered.

He was an adept in the contortions that constitute the popular Parisian quadrille, and on this occasion he surpassed himself. He capered about with an agility and gaiety that elicited the warm applause of surrounding *connoisseurs*, while his partner performed her part with equal skill and spirit, spinning round and round in the most startling fashion. In the twinkling of an eye a crowd of amateurs had formed a circle around them. But in the midst of their triumph, a loud hubbub suddenly arose in the hall, and Carnac, who was on the alert, distinctly heard these words flying past him: "Margot summons her band!"

The phrase had a peculiar significance to Carnac, but there was nothing to prove that Margot was present. Seven grotesque masks, including Adrien, whom they had met at the door, now forced their way through the crowd, uttering shrill cries that drowned the music of the orchestra. There was a gendarme, a conscript, a fish-woman, a nurse, a Turk, a

helmeted warrior, and a gipsy. The fish-woman and the nurse evidently belonged to the stronger sex, and Carnac was beginning to think that the feminine element would not be represented at all in the quadrille of honour, when he perceived a woman—a real woman this time—disguised as a Spanish gipsy—such a gipsy as one rarely sees, however. She wore a black velvet bodice, a short, full skirt of *moire antique*, silk stockings, satin shoes, a big shell comb in her hair, and black pearls in her ears. The dress must have cost at least twenty-five napoleons, not including the pearls, which were worth fully ten thousand francs, if they were genuine. But the bodice had been slashed in a dozen places with scissors, the skirt hung in tatters, the stockings were full of holes, the shoes were ragged, and the comb broken. It was evident, however, at a glance, that all the rents were attributable to the practised hand of a skilful dress-maker. The gipsy had sacrificed many yards of costly material so as to represent a beggar in rags.

This costly whim seemingly indicated that the wearer belonged to a superior sphere in life. Carnac believed this to be the case, and the fact that this woman alone was closely masked confirmed him in his opinion. A black velvet mask, tied tightly at the back of her head, covered half of her forehead, her eyes, and nearly all of the lower part of her face.

At the Elysée Montmartre dancers do not usually take so much pains to conceal their faces, unless they go there to carry on some intrigue. So this woman must have had some particular reason for hiding her features, and the precaution indicated plainly enough that she did not belong to the same class as the persons who formed her escort. Her especial companion was, of course, a gipsy, a tall, well-built fellow, artistically costumed, with a red feather in his hat, striped stockings, and a rapier at his side. Attracted by the crowd, the party finally paused near the set in which Carnac was distinguishing himself, and he, thinking this a good opportunity for attracting the masked gipsy's attention by a display of his powers, exerted himself to the uttermost. He even ventured to introduce sundry steps of his own invention which would have made professionals turn pale with envy, and which elicited shouts of admiration from the spectators. Even his partner was astonished, and he unquestionably gained the approval of the Spanish gipsy, for she managed to place herself in front of the savage who was executing the dance of civilisation with so much spirit.

Carnac thus had an excellent opportunity to scrutinise the new-comer, during his intervals of rest. He felt no anxiety that Madame de Carouge might recognise him—that is, if this woman were really Madame de Carouge, for she had scarcely deigned to give him a look when she had met him in Gerfaut's studio; besides, his costume and war-paint transformed him completely. But was this woman Madame de Carouge? He doubted it very much. The gipsy seemed to him more slender in figure, and she had jet black hair, while the locks of the great singer were of a rich auburn tint. True, one can dye one's hair or put on a wig, but he was under the impression that the singer was a little taller. Still, like the latter, the gipsy had coral lips and very white teeth. Was this, indeed, the famous Margot, the former queen of the public balls of Paris? at all events, under her protecting mask her scar was invisible.

"I cannot compel her to disclose her secret," thought Carnac. "My only possible means of discovering it, is to let her see my ring. If this woman be Madame de Carouge she will recognise it, and ask me how it came into my possession."

The orchestra was striking up the first measures of the second figure of the quadrille, and Carnac prepared to distinguish himself. "If Mademoiselle Brunier could only see me," he soliloquised, "she would certainly have a nice opinion of me! She would never have anything more to do with me, and there would be little or no probability of our ever paying a visit to the Louvre together. But fortunately she will never know that I donned the garb of a savage a few hours after leaving her. Besides, I am working in her friends' interest. The end justifies the means."

This maxim, so dear to the hearts of the Jesuits, quieted Carnac's conscience, and in the country dance into which the quadrille finally resolved itself he disported himself with an agility and enthusiasm that showed him to be a master of the Terpsichorean art. Each of his steps was a masterpiece, and he concluded by walking on his hands.

The new-comers had taken places near him, and were certainly worthy of keeping him company. The gendarme imitated a dancing-bear to perfection, the fish-woman kicked her basket up on her shoulder with marvellous dexterity; the pretended nurse flung her legs high above her head and played all sorts of antics with the rag-baby she carried; the Turk executed salaams which displayed the seat of his wide white trousers, upon which the print of a muddy shoe was distinctly visible; the conscript dealt vigorous blows in every direction, and finally leaped upon the shoulders of the man wearing the helmet. The pair of gipsies seemed to be content with admiring the others, for their evolutions were confined to occasional balancings and turns, but it soon became evident that they were quite able to eclipse their companions if they chose. The undulating movements and restless feet of the ragged woman in whom Carnac took such an interest promised wonders, and if she refrained from exhibiting her powers, it was no doubt because she was reserving herself for the grand finale, as at the opera, when after a figure executed by the ballet corps, the *première danseuse* or star displays her talents in a *pas seul* composed expressly for herself.

At the Elysée it is even better, for every one is at liberty to do exactly as he likes, and regulate his steps to suit himself. All bold achievements are enthusiastically applauded, and the excesses must be great, indeed, for the managers to interfere. Carnac was impatiently awaiting an opportunity, for he fancied that the gipsy woman was watching him, and he wanted to show her the ring he wore on his finger. But an amethyst does not glitter like a diamond, and he was too far from the masked lady for her to notice a ring which had nothing particularly striking about it. To draw her attention to it he would be obliged to place it under her very eyes, and he at last devised an ingenious plan for doing so. Towards the close of the third figure, after the gentlemen balance to the right, all the first couples promenade around, and Carnac made up to join in the round of the set near by as soon as the lady in the tattered silk took part in it. Dancers are under no constraint at the Elysée, and such liberties, provided they are indulged in pleasantly, never give offence; so watching his opportunity, when the lady offered her slender white hands to the gendarme for the promenade, Carnac hastily caught hold of them, having first taken care to push his own partner towards the gendarme, and the two started madly off together to the great dissatisfaction of the couple opposite who were thus left alone.

The gipsy made no effort to disengage herself, but rather seemed to take

pleasure in prolonging their round. Carnac endeavoured to make his ring as conspicuous as possible, and it seemed to him that the lady noticed it. He even fancied he felt a slight pressure from the tapering fingers he held, but his fair partner did not utter a word. When he took her back to her place, there were two or three cries of "*Vive Margot!*" but they came from the crowd around. The members of the party were silent, and Carnac concluded that their silence was probably due to an order given by the lady, who had doubtless hired them to accompany her to the ball.

"Who are they talking about?" inquired Carnac's partner, who was a little jealous of the admiration excited by the gipsy woman's spirited dancing.

"You will have to ask Adrien," replied the young sculptor.

"I'd rather be excused, if it's all the same to you."

"Why, are you afraid of him?"

"I should like to see him dare touch me. I'd slap his face for him. But I don't talk to low fellows like him."

"But he evidently belongs to that lady's party; and she is certainly very stylish. Look at the pearls in her ears."

"Pshaw! they are nothing but paste. If she is the woman they call Margot, all I've got to say is that Margot is nothing very wonderful."

Carnac said no more. There was evidently no information to be gained from this girl, who had never heard of Margot before, and who probably knew no more about Adrien than Carnac did himself. The dance ended without any other incident.

"It is so close and warm here that it makes one terribly thirsty. Will you treat me to a drink?" inquired his fair partner.

"I'm sorry, but I haven't a penny with me," replied Carnac dolefully.

"I forgot to bring my purse."

"Good-bye, then. I don't like penniless beaux." And thereupon she left him, which was exactly what Carnac wanted.

He had just noticed the gipsy and her party wending their way towards the café at the end of the hall, and he was wondering how he could manœuvre to join them and enter into conversation with them. It would be no easy matter, for the gipsy was closely attended, and her body-guard did not seem inclined to give a cordial reception to any intruder who tried to ingratiate himself into her favour, and share her bounty. Still the young sculptor was determined to solve the mystery at any cost. The idea of questioning Graindorge occurred to him, for as that official was still at his post near the door, he must have seen the party enter. Carnac had already turned towards the entrance, when a hand was abruptly laid on his arm. He turned quickly, and found himself face to face with the gipsy woman, who exclaimed: "You dance very well, and your appearance pleases me, so I should like to invite you for the next waltz. In the meantime come and take a glass of punch with me." Her voice was sweet, but she spoke with a strong accent, which Carnac had not noticed while listening to the conversation of the *prima donna* in the sculptor's studio. "It is not Madame de Carouge," he thought.

"Come," repeated the gipsy, taking his arm.

"Thank you; but I am not thirsty," replied the student of nature.

"That makes no difference. One need not be thirsty to enjoy a glass of punch. Come."

"I don't drink with any one when I haven't money to return the compliment."

"What an obstinate creature you are ! I should not have believed it. Well, if you won't drink, you will at least talk to me while I drink."

The gipsy evidently had some special object in proposing a *tête-à-tête* ; and Carnac was not conceited enough to suppose that she had become a victim to his charms of person or manner. "What if it should be Madame de Carouge after all?" he said to him-self. "In that case has she recognised me, in spite of my war paint, or is it my ring that has attracted her attention ? In either case, I should be a fool not to take advantage of this opportunity to satisfy my doubts."

Seeing that he did not move, the woman continued : "I repeat that your appearance pleases me, and that I should like to make your acquaintance. You and I are the only persons here who know how to dance."

"If you said that *you* were the only one you would be nearer the truth. I only caper about ; but you dance. I would be willing to swear that you learned the trick at Malaga or Seville."

"Perhaps I have just come from there."

"Then that is the reason we have seen nothing of you for so long."

"What ! did you ever see me before ?" she asked, hastily.

"Yes, or rather, I am not sure. Just now, I heard some one shout '*Vive Margot !*' and it reminded me of a person of that name who used to frequent the Elysée seven or eight years ago. I recollect her very well ; she had a scar on her cheek. But you are so closely masked that I can't tell whether you are the same person or not."

"Oh, I see what you are after, you mischievous fellow. You want me to remove my mask, so as to ascertain if I am pretty. Ah, well I will do so by-and-by, but not here in this crowd. At supper I won't refuse you, and you shall see that I have no scar on my face. You mistake me for some one else, my dear. The Margot you speak of knowing seven or eight years ago must have arrived at a respectable age by this time, while I am not yet twenty. My Christian name is Pepita, and if you will come with me, I will tell you my history. I shan't excuse you. I have had a table reserved for us, and the punch is ready."

"For you and your party. I am not one of the number."

"For you and me, simpleton. I'm with no party. As I came in I happened to meet the clowns who were dancing near us a few moments ago, and I remained with them simply because I thought I should find them amusing. But I came alone, and I shall go home alone unless you will take supper with me at the Helder or the Café Americain."

"I should be delighted, but I haven't a penny in my pocket, as I told you before."

"Nonsense ; don't put on so many airs ! Monsieur is proud ; monsieur won't allow a lady to treat him. Simpleton, you will be under no obligation. You happen to be hard up to-day, but you won't always be in that condition, and you can return the compliment at some other time."

This arrangement was not altogether to the taste of Carnac, who never liked to be indebted to any one ; but this woman interested him more than ever. He was anxious to know how the adventure would finish, and his curiosity overcame his pride. "Very well," he said at last ; "where is your table ?"

The woman then led him to the café at the rear of the ball-room. This establishment was terribly crowded, for nearly all the dancers had hastened there for refreshments after their exertions. Conspicuous in the throng were the persons who had entered the ball-room with the masked

woman. They were all talking loudly, and drinking to excess. They even seemed to have picked up several recruits, for the tall fellow who had acted as the gipsy girl's escort was holding a showily-dressed girl on his knee, while Adrien was engaged in scraping the sugar from the bottom of a punch-bowl with a pewter spoon. The masked woman passed within a few inches of them, but they paid no more attention to her than if they had never seen her before. Carnac almost began to believe that she had told the truth, and that she was really not acquainted with these disreputable fellows. However, she conducted him to a corner, where a bowl of punch was smoking upon a table, guarded by a waiter. The latter, who must have received a liberal gratuity for this service, went off as soon as the couple were seated. The so-called Pepita then filled two glasses, and as soon as Carnac had emptied his, she cried: "Well, now, that's sensible. I am glad to see that you have concluded not to be so unsociable. But don't fancy that I bear you any ill-will for your reluctance. I don't like prigs, but I dislike forward, conceited men still more. I saw at once that you didn't belong to that set, and I now perceive that you are an intelligent man, for you were shrewd enough to see that I, too, am not a mere nobody. To reward you for your confidence in me, I will tell you that I am the *première danseuse* of the principal theatre at Cadiz."

"I suspected as much," said Carnac, laughing; "but you are not a Spaniard. You speak French too well."

"I was born in Paris, and I shall return here to live some day; but I have been coining money down there, where I have another engagement for six months. After I leave the hidalgos, I intend to live upon my income in the city where I first saw the light. If I dance then it will only be for my own amusement, as I have done to-night. I have had quite enough of the stage, and I am heartily tired of Cadiz; so next winter, if you should still happen to be in Paris, we can attend some of the balls and enjoy ourselves together."

"Nothing could please me better, especially if you are really Margot."

"I am tired of hearing about your Margot. You seem to have Margot on the brain. Were you so desperately in love with her?"

"No indeed; but she danced so well."

"As well as I do?"

"By no means. In the first place, she belonged to an entirely different class."

"I presume so. I can see her now. She was probably one of the kind that leap from one end of the stage to the other, and stand for an unconscionable time upon one foot. I leave such exercises to acrobats. But what became of your divinity?"

"No one knows. Still, you might ask that man with the long beard who danced next to you a few moments ago. He was one of the party who were always in her quadrille. I recognised him, and that is the reason I fancied you were Margot; and others must have thought so, too, for I heard them mention her name."

"The idiots! I despise them; and as for that fellow with a nose like a vulture's beak, and who's dressed like a travelling dentist, I wouldn't be seen speaking to him. His costume shows what he is. It isn't like yours. Yours is a complete success, and so uncommon! Where did you get your jaguar skin, and those moccasins? And your face—not one person in a thousand would know how to make up a face like yours. I would bet almost anything that you are an artist."

Carnac coloured, but his war-paint concealed his blushes, and he had the presence of mind to reply: "That's true. I belong to the stage."

"Then we are comrades. Where do you play?"

"Oh, in different theatres. I am just beginning. I hope I shall be successful; but I have not had a part allotted to me as yet. In the meantime I am content to serve as a super in order to accustom myself to the glare of the footlights."

"You are right. I began in the same way myself. But what did you do before?"

"Nothing. I lived at home with my parents; but they lost all their money and died, and now I am alone in the world."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Ernest, as yours is only Pepita."

"You will tell me your family name when we know each other better; and I will tell you mine as well. Your good health, Ernest?"

Carnac held out his glass to touch the gipsy's, and as he did so she cried: "Oh, what a pretty ring! Let me look at it."

He willingly surrendered his hand, for he had accomplished his aim. The ring had attracted the attention of the mysterious stranger. Still, jewellery always possesses a peculiar fascination for women; and there was, as yet, nothing to prove that the gipsy had any personal reason for desiring to examine the ring picked up in the passage of the Mont-de-Piété. "Why, there is a coat-of-arms engraved upon the stone!" she exclaimed. "Are you a nobleman, then?"

"No, it is a ring that came down to me from my maternal grandmother," replied Carnac, unblushingly.

"That amounts to the same thing. If your grandmother was of noble birth, your mother must have been, and you, too, my friend. I felt sure that you were no ordinary person. But there is certainly a motto above the shield. What is it? You, of course, know your ancestral device?"

"I don't, upon my word! I have tried to make it out, but the letters are too fine, and I have never succeeded."

"It is very strange that you never questioned your mother on the matter. If I had a crest I should know it by heart, and have it embroidered on all my linen."

There was a silence. Carnac felt that he was blundering, and concluded that it was advisable for him to keep quiet. The gipsy had not relinquished her hold upon his hand, and was watching him all the while with a persistence that disconcerted him. "Would you like to make a bargain with me?" she suddenly asked.

"That depends."

"I have fallen in love with your ring. Will you sell it to me?"

"Sell you my ring!" exclaimed Carnac. "Certainly not. I am not a dealer in *bric-à-brac*."

"Then give it to me."

"Impossible, my dear lady. I inherited it from my mother, and I set great value on it."

"Nonsense; why don't you admit that you are unwilling to make me a present of a ring that is worth at least a hundred francs? I can very readily understand that, and I don't blame you in the least; but, as I said before, I have taken a fancy to your ring, and I would rather give you ten napoleons for it than not have it."

"You couldn't have it if you offered me twenty-five, and I'm not rich."

"But if I offered you thirty, what would you say then?" inquired the so-called Pepita, who pretended to regard Carnac's answer as an attempt to obtain a higher price.

"You would succeed no better. I shan't sell it at any price."

"How silly of you! You just told me that you didn't even know your coat-of-arms, and yet you refuse to take six hundred francs for a ring on which no pawnbroker would lend you twenty-five francs. But perhaps you don't believe that I have the thirty napoleons. Would you like to see them?"

"It isn't worth while. I know very well that you have plenty of money; but I shall never part with this ring. It is a family relic."

"Bah! do you think I swallowed the nonsensical story you just invented? A super has no ancestors. Have I any? Mine were porters. Yours were, perhaps, well-to-do citizens, but not nobles—you can't make me believe that."

"But if I had no particular reason for prizing the ring, I certainly should be very glad to sell it to you at the price you offer. Six hundred francs! Why, I could live for six months on six hundred francs."

"And yet you refuse my offer! Oh, I understand, the ring doesn't belong to you. It has been lent to you, and as you are an honest fellow, you are resolved to return it. Ah, well, who's the owner of it? Probably some woman who borrowed it from her lover, unless she found it in the street. Give me her name and address, and I'll go and see her. I assure you that I shall have no difficulty in coming to an understanding with her."

"You are mistaken," Carnac replied. "The ring belongs to me, but I am anxious to keep it for the reasons I have just stated. However, tell me why you are so anxious to have it?"

The gipsy started. Carnac's blow had told. "That is no business of yours," she answered, drily, and then perceiving the effect produced by this reply: "You are too inquisitive," she said, more graciously, "but I am very good-natured, so I don't mind confessing that I am very fond of old jewels. In fact, collecting them is a sort of hobby with me, and when I see anything that pleases me I don't think of the cost. I shall have to do without this, however, as you refuse to part with it; but that is no reason why we shouldn't remain good friends. I hear the first strains of one of my favourite waltzes, so come and dance it with me. We will go and take supper somewhere afterwards."

"I will waltz with you with the greatest pleasure; but it is too soon to think of supper."

"Are you enjoying yourself so much here?"

"Not inordinately; but I have only just come, and I should like to dance one or two more quadrilles to get up an appetite."

But Carnac had other reasons for refusing. In the first place, he wished to inquire of Graindorge if he had recognised Margot in the masked gipsy; and in the second place, surprised that this strange creature should have renounced her whim so suddenly, he asked himself if this invitation to supper did not conceal some trap, and if the pretended Pepita did not intend to employ violent means to secure the ornament she had failed to purchase. The scoundrels who had entered the hall with her were not far off, and there was nothing to prevent her from pointing the savage out to them, and offering them a reward for taking the ring from him.

"Ah, well, that being the case, I must deprive myself of the pleasure of your company," she said petulantly. "I see that you are only a

simpleton, after all, and I don't like simpletons. I shall sup alone, and probably I shall have no trouble in finding another partner. Enjoy yourself, Ernest, and take care not to lose the ring of your ancestors."

According to the custom of the place, she had paid in advance for the punch which she and Carnac had scarcely tasted, and now with a bound she sprang into the middle of the café, laid her hand on the shoulder of the man in the helmet, and led him into the ball-room. The rest of the band had already taken their departure, shouting loudly and overturning the tables.

Carnac, rather disconcerted, also left the café, and an instant afterwards he perceived the black-bearded man and the silk-attired gipsy locked in each other's arms and whirling round and round at a furious rate. The other members of the party were waltzing in the same place, all holding themselves somewhat aloof from the other dancers. As the young sculptor stood watching the gipsy, he noticed that she was carrying on a very animated conversation with her partner while she danced, and that the other couples exchanged a few words with her each time she passed them. His few remaining doubts vanished, and he said to himself: "This is certainly Margot and her band. She pretended, just now, that she did not know those men, and yet I see her issuing orders to them as they dance. What orders? She is probably telling them to follow me when I go out, and attack me in the street. It is time for me to take some precautions."

He accordingly directed his steps towards the door where he hoped to find Graindorge. The crowd was even more dense than before, and it was almost impossible to force one's way through it; but by dint of pushing and coaxing, Carnac finally succeeded in reaching the friend he sought. He was fortunate enough to find him alone, Colache having gone off a few moments before to see what was going on in the corner of the room reserved for games of chance.

"Graindorge, old fellow, I am almost sure that Margot is here," said Carnac, without any preamble.

"What! is that you?" exclaimed Graindorge, in profound astonishment. "If you hadn't spoken to me, I should never have recognised you. Your disguise is certainly perfect."

"Yes, I fancy I know how to make myself up pretty well. Have you seen Margot's band—a nurse, a gendarme, a fish-woman, and one or two more? It is their leader, though, that I would like you to notice."

"The masked gipsy? I did notice her; but Margot never wore a mask."

"She may not have worn a mask in former years, but at present she may have reasons for wishing to conceal her face, particularly if she is now figuring as Madame de Carouge, as we suspect."

Graindorge did not have time to reply, for a surging mass of human beings, in which the gendarme and the black-bearded man were especially noticeable, and which seemed to start from the further end of the ball-room, suddenly surrounded him and the young sculptor. In the twinkling of an eye, Carnac was hemmed in, driven back to the wall, and jammed against it until his breath nearly failed him. At the same instant, he was caught by the arm, and a strong hand imprisoned his. "Ah, the rascals!" he muttered; "it is my ring they are after!"

He instinctively clenched his fist. There is no surer means of preventing a ring from coming off the fingers, and Carnac had a very strong grip. The hand that was trying to remove the ring laboured in vain, but the terrible

crowding increased in violence. Pressed tightly against the wall, Gerfaut's pupil was beginning to lose his breath, and what troubled him even more was that he could not turn to face the persons who were thus crushing him. As usual in such cases, the first impetus had been given by a party of cunning scoundrels. The crowd had followed them without knowing why, and were now pushing so violently against the persons nearest to the young sculptor, that the poor fellow was in imminent danger of being crushed. Graindorge also found himself caught in this same living vice, and while Carnac was resisting with all his strength the policeman shouted "Help, help!" at the top of his voice. Fortunately, Colache was not far off, and there were other policemen in the hall, to say nothing of the municipal guards. The cry was heard, and the police and attendants all rushed to the rescue. It was time they did so, for the strength of the two victims was nearly exhausted.

Graindorge, flattened against the wall, was no longer able to emit a sound, and Carnac was bowed nearly to the floor by the weight which he had so heroically sustained. He could not see his assailants, not even the one who was trying to obtain possession of the ring, but a plume grazed his neck, and this plume probably adorned the helmet of Adrien, the man with the hooked nose, who was the husband of the woman Carnac had befriended, and very possibly Margot's prime minister. Accordingly, the young sculptor gave himself the satisfaction of bestowing several vigorous kicks upon his antagonist, and stoutly resisted all the rascal's efforts to open his tightly-clenched fist. He was on the point of succumbing, however, when relief came in the shape of the little band of officers led by Colache. These well-trained, determined men soon dispersed the crowd, and in the momentary confusion that ensued, they laid hands on any one who happened to be within their reach. But there were only five or six of them against a multitude, and many of the miscreants escaped. The most culpable were the most prompt in decamping, and the innocent suffered for the guilty, as is usual in such cases.

It took Carnac several seconds to recover his breath after he was released, and by the time he was in a condition to render his defenders any assistance, the man with the helmet had vanished. His companions also had disappeared in the crowd. While the poor innocent wretches who had been arrested were expostulating with Colache, Graindorge approached the young sculptor, and whispered: "You were right; Margot is here. This is one of her capers. It isn't the first time she has played the same trick."

"Are you going to take her to the station-house?" asked Carnac, eagerly.

"Yes, without any loss of time. Where is the hussy?"

"Let us look for her. Heaven grant that she hasn't taken advantage of the opportunity to decamp. I don't see her among the dancers."

"Let us look in the café."

They entered, but not finding the gipsy, they returned to the ball-room and made the round with no more success. "She escaped during the confusion. I suspected as much," growled Carnac, greatly disappointed. "The man we met at Barbizon's has disappeared too. He tried his best to smother and rob me. I could not get at his face, but I will be even with him yet. Still, I don't care so very much about him. It is losing sight of Margot that I regret."

"Oh, you will have plenty of chances of seeing her again. The carnival

season isn't over, and if Margot has returned to France, it is probably for the purpose of enjoying herself. She won't miss a single masquerade ball, so you have only to be on hand here next Thursday evening."

"I don't think it will be worth my while. I told her too much, and I am almost sure that she distrusted me. I am certain, too, that there will be some new and important events before next Thursday. In the meantime, you and your comrades had better arrest all the members of her band you can lay your hands upon. Then you can find out their names and where they live, and learn through them the address of their leader."

"Nothing would suit me better, but it would be necessary for them to begin by violating the law in some way or other, and they are not fools enough to do that."

"But, good heavens! they tried to kill both you and me! Isn't that enough?"

"If we could have caught them in the act it would have been all right, but there is no means of doing it now. They would declare that they had done nothing, and if we undertook to arrest them under such circumstances, there would be a general row, which we couldn't contend against as we are not numerous enough."

"If that be the case I had better get away as soon as possible, for they will surely repeat the attempt, and there isn't much left of me now. I feel about as thick as a sheet of tissue paper. Margot has given them their orders, and it wouldn't surprise me if they followed me out upon the boulevard. I think I had better leave while they are dancing. It will be the safest way."

"You are right; and I should advise you not to loiter about outside. The man we met at Barbizon's isn't far off, perhaps."

"Don't be alarmed. I'll keep my eyes open; and, speaking of Barbizon's, if ever you wish to see me you can find me there any evening, and you know that it will always give me pleasure to offer you a glass of beer."

Carnac did not wait to hear his companion's reply, for Colache, who had released his prisoners, was approaching, and Carnac did not care to make his acquaintance, thinking it quite enough to be on intimate terms with one policeman. He pushed the door open and began to descend the steps amid the shouts of the spectators on the sidewalk. His costume was one to attract attention wherever he went, and he was anxious to get rid of it, as he did not care to go home in the attire of a redskin. The question was to know if Madame Langoumois' shop was still open.

Considerable time had elapsed since he first entered the ball-room; and though there were still several vehicles and groups of loafers in front of the entrance on the boulevard, which Carnac would be obliged to cross, wayfarers were scarce. So, before venturing any further, the young sculptor wished to make sure that the shop was still lighted, and that Adrien was nowhere about. After satisfying himself on these points, he made his way through the crowd, and directed his steps toward Madame Langoumois' shop, intending to resume his own garments there, return home, on foot, necessarily, as he had no money, and go to bed. He meant to enjoy a few hours' refreshing sleep, and then pay Madame de Carouge a visit, and inquire if she had not lost a ring. As he hurried on, he espied a man in a blouse and cap, who seemed to be asleep on a bench under the trees. Carnac passed this fellow, but kept a sharp eye on him, and saw that after he had gone by the man rose from the bench and followed him. He was almost

certain that the stranger wore long boots, and the thought that Adrien had substituted a cap and blouse for his doublet and helmet instantly occurred to him. "Oh, ho! so that is your game," he muttered. "I shouldn't be surprised if Margot were hiding somewhere near. Carnac, my friend, take care of your ring."

He reached the shop in safety, however, and awoke Madame Langoumois, who was snoring peacefully in a big arm chair, in the midst of her goods and chattels. "What! you have returned already?" she cried. "Is there no fun going on at the Elysée to-night?"

"Yes; but I have had enough of it," replied Carnac. "I have created a sensation, and should now like to resume my own modest attire. Where are my clothes?"

"In the back shop, exactly where you left them. Go and dress yourself, and as soon as you are ready to leave I'll close the shop. It is too late now for any more customers to come in."

"Don't worry; my toilet won't require much time."

But he soon discovered that he had reckoned without his host, and that his toilet would be not only a long, but an exceedingly difficult operation. He required fully half an hour's hard work to divest himself of his war-paint, and become himself again. But at last the task was completed, and he glanced at himself in the mirror, with a sigh of mingled relief and satisfaction. He was about to slip on his finger the ring which he had removed before washing himself, when he perceived a small magnifying glass lying on the same table where he had placed the ornament. "How lucky!" he muttered. "Now I can decipher the motto engraved on the amethyst. I understand nothing about heraldry, but when I have found out what this device is, I shall know better what to think."

The motto was in German text, and even with the aid of the magnifying glass Carnac had some difficulty in spelling out the words: "*Ny char, ny destrier, Rien que mon bras.*"\*

"What the deuce does that mean?" growled our student of nature. "A *destrier* is a horse, if I am not very much mistaken; a *char* is a chariot; a *bras* is an arm, and *ni* is written with a *y* to give the motto a mediæval twang. But what do the words signify in this connection? Possibly that the count's ancestors went about neither in carriages, nor on horseback, but travelled on foot, like common people. In that case, instead of adding, 'Nothing but my arm,' they should have said, 'Nothing but my legs.' But that would not have been sufficiently grandiloquent, I suppose, for a man uses his legs to run away with, while with his arm he strikes his foes. Nevertheless, I must say that I don't think much of this war-cry of the count's ancestors." But, after a moment's reflection he suddenly exclaimed: "How stupid I am! Why, it is a pun! In this, '*Ny char, ny destrier*,' we find the family name of the bold knight for whom the crest was designed—the ancestor of the present Charny. It is as plain as day. The ring belongs to that handsome coxcomb who is soon to marry my employer's daughter. This is surely a discovery worth making."

It was, indeed, as strange as it was unexpected; and the conclusions that might be drawn from it instantly flashed across Carnac's mind. There could be no doubt but that the ring had been lost at the door of the Mont-de-Piété by Madame de Carouge; and so that lady must be intimately acquainted with M. de Charny. Moreover, it must also have been Madame

---

\* "Neither chariot nor steed, nothing but my arm."

de Carouge whom Carnac had just seen at the ball with disreputable companions, for no one else would have offered six hundred francs for a bauble that was not worth ten, or resorted to violence when all peaceful methods of obtaining it had proved unavailing. If Madame de Carouge were such an utterly unscrupulous person M. de Charny could be no better, for he pretended to be unacquainted with her, while he was perfectly well aware that she had been formerly known as Margot, and had led, and was still leading, a very disreputable life.

"And poor Gerfaut is on the eve of giving his daughter to this rascal!" muttered Carnac. "I can prevent that, fortunately, for I shall tell him what I have discovered to-night. I may find it difficult to convince him, but I shall soon be able to furnish proofs of the truth of my assertions. I shall call on the pretended singer to-morrow. It will be very strange if I can't detect the scar; and I shall have no trouble in persuading Moumoute to tell me about this Adrien who seemed to be Margot's chief fugleman. I will make some inquiries about this Count de Charny also, and find out where he goes, and what kind of company he keeps, even if I have to follow him myself. Besides, I am sure that Graindorge will not refuse to help me. But I must begin at the beginning; that is to say, I must first make certain that this is really Monsieur de Charny's coat-of-arms. That won't be a difficult task, for Mademoiselle Brunier won't refuse to question Mademoiselle Gerfaut on the subject. Young ladies are always interested in such matters, so if Mademoiselle Camille is not familiar with her lover's crest she will inquire about it; and as the question will seem perfectly natural, he won't hesitate to answer it, particularly as it will flatter his vanity."

At this moment the young sculptor's soliloquy was interrupted by Madame Langoumois, who cried: "Well, haven't you nearly finished your toilet?"

"Here I am! here I am!" exclaimed Carnac, slipping the ring into his waistcoat pocket, and stepping into the front shop, where he found the old lady locking up her money drawer.

"Would you mind helping me a little with the shutters?" she inquired.

"Certainly not, certainly not. You gave me credit, so it is only right that I should help you when I can."

He at once stepped to the door and was about to open it, when he perceived the savage face of the bearded man pressed close against the glass pane. The rascal instantly drew back, and then rapidly walked away, but Carnac, who had recognised him, opened the door and looked out. Three other men were on the esplanade in the middle of the boulevard. They were walking along separately, one after another, and Adrien began to do the same. They were too far off for Carnac to be able to see their faces, but he felt sure that they were waiting for him with the intention of assaulting him. He could not take a cab, as he had not sufficient money, and his plan was soon formed. "I say, Madame Langoumois," he asked, "you don't want me to be assaulted and killed, do you?"

"I should be very sorry if such a thing happened."

"Well, if you turn me out that will surely be my fate. Four men tried to get up a fight with me at the ball. They are now lying in wait for me outside, and they will spring upon me at the first street corner. They saw me enter here, and they are now watching for me to come out."

"They must be the men who came and looked in at the window a few minutes ago. Hard-looking customers they were, too. I am no coward, but I must say they frightened me."

"If you knew them as well as I do, you would have been even more alarmed. They think no more of killing a man than of wringing a parrot's neck."

"Then I shan't stay here, I'm sure. They might take it into their heads to come in."

"There is no danger of that. There are too many people about, to say nothing of the two policemen at the door of the Elysée Montmartre. Besides, it isn't you they are after."

"Perhaps not; but they might take a notion to help themselves to my stock."

"They wouldn't dare to plunder a shop only fifty yards from the Elysée while a ball is going on there, and it will be daylight by the time the dancing is over; while, as for me, if I leave here, I shall certainly be followed."

"I don't want you killed, of course, but what is to be done?"

"Oh, we can manage very easily. All we have to do is to lock ourselves in. They won't attempt to break open the door. It would make too much noise."

"Well, what then?"

"Then, my good mother, we can have a game of besique—you must have some cards in the shop—that is, unless you would prefer to talk. I can tell you some capital stories."

"Until to-morrow morning! Thank you, but I'm too sleepy for that."

"Then you shall sleep peacefully in your arm-chair, while I stand guard; and when the daylight comes, I will escort you to your own door. You will be a little tired, perhaps, but you will have all day to rest, and the satisfaction of knowing that you have kindly saved my life."

"If I were sure that the rascals really meant to kill you, I wouldn't hesitate to spend two such nights instead of one; but you artists are such liars."

"I have no desire to deceive you, or to joke at the present moment, and I assure you that my life is really in danger."

"But how have you offended them, and why should they wish to harm you? It is hardly likely that they take you for a millionaire, and hope to find your pockets stuffed full of bank-notes."

"Oh, there is a woman mixed up in the affair, of course. Did you ever hear of a woman named Margot?"

"Margot with the scar! I should think I had. I have sold her laces many a time, and she used to let me have all her old clothes."

"Who was she?"

"A worthless character, of course, but one of the aristocratic kind, and as sharp and shrewd as possible. She would be rich now if she had not had a lover who gambled away all she earned. All the money she gave him went in that way."

"What was his name?" inquired Carnac, eagerly.

"I never knew his name. They kept it a secret. But they have had nothing to do with each other for a long time now. Margot has been either in the country or in foreign parts for several years. He is still in Paris, at least, I think so; for I met him only a short time ago."

"You know him by sight, then?"

"Yes, indeed. He is a handsome, light-haired fellow, with quite a distinguished look. But why do you ask me all these questions?"

"Because, at the ball there was a masked woman whom some

simpletons mistook for Margot. But I am sure that you are not going to drive me out of your shop, so I will lock the door. There, it is done, and we are now ready to sustain a siege. Sleep in peace, Madame Langoumois, Jean Carnac is guarding you."

The worthy woman protested a little for form's sake, but finally settled herself comfortably in her arm-chair and went to sleep.

Carnac was as particular not to disturb her as he had been not to take her too much into his confidence. He resolved, however, to question her later on, respecting Margot and her lover. For the time being his attention was turned to the scoundrels who were still loitering about outside. He saw them each take a seat on a bench and pretend to go to sleep; but he was not deceived by this manœuvre. On the contrary, he waited patiently until daybreak, and was even considerate enough not to light his pipe for fear of annoying the good woman who had inconvenienced herself to shelter him. Two or three times Adrien's unprepossessing face peered in through the window pane, but seeing that Carnac showed no signs of leaving, he finally became discouraged and decamped. His followers, one after another, did the same. At seven o'clock, when it became broad daylight and people began to move about the streets, Carnac roused Madame Langoumois, escorted her to her private residence in the Rue des Martyrs, and then entered a café to treat himself to a cup of chocolate, before returning home, where he intended to remain and rest until he could with propriety call upon Madame de Carouge.

#### IV

ONE's evenings can be spent in many different ways, especially in Paris. A person can dance one night at the Elysée Montmartre and attend a fashionable musical entertainment at a highly respectable mansion a few evenings afterwards. Such was the case with Jean Carnac, our enterprising student of nature. He accompanied his master, Gerfaut, to Madame Stenay's soirée, and like the Doge of Venice at Versailles, what astonished him the most was to find himself there. Gerfaut had been obliged to use all his powers of persuasion to induce his pupil to accompany him, and also to lend him an old dress coat which fitted him very well, as they were of about the same build. The young sculptor would have liked to array himself in the garb of Michael Angelo, or at least in a velvet doublet and pearl grey knee-breeches, like an actor in a melodrama. But it is necessary to submit to custom in this prosaic age of ours; besides, Carnac had several reasons for being willing to sacrifice his artistic tastes, for since the memorable night of the masked ball all his plans had failed, one after another.

After sleeping most of the morning to make up for the hours of vigil spent in Madame Langoumois' shop, he had gone to the Rue d'Anjou to call upon Madame de Carouge. Admitted into the ante-chamber of a handsome suite of apartments by a bright-eyed maid, he asked to see the great vocalist, but was told that madame did not receive strangers. He, however, insisted on an interview, declaring that he had come to return an article of jewellery which belonged to Madame de Carouge and which he had found. The maid left the room to consult her mistress, but the latter sent word that she had lost nothing, and must beg M. Carnac not to disturb her.

He was consequently obliged to beat a retreat, nor could he close his eyes to the fact that he had made a blunder. One of two things was certain : either Madame de Carouge told the truth, in which case he had been following up a wrong c'ue from the outset, or else she lied—preferring to lose the ring rather than confess that she had lost it at the Mont-de-Piété. In the latter case, Carnac's visit was a great mistake, as he had called upon her in person and consequently she would be sure to recognise him whenever she revisited M. Gerfaut's studio, according to her promise ; for it was probable that she had inspected her visitor through the keyhole ; and even if she had not done so, her maid's description of his person would amply suffice.

Poor Carnac had likewise been disappointed in his hopes of obtaining information from other sources. The woman whom he had befriended came to the sculptor's house at the appointed hour, and Mademoiselle Gerfaut, on Carnac's recommendation, not only gave her employment but liberal pecuniary aid as well. The poor creature's real name was Jeanne Plantin, and she certainly deserved assistance, for her history was extremely touching. She related the principal incidents of it in the studio, in Camille's presence, and when she left the house Carnac walked with her a little way, to question her still further. He had witnessed the scene between her and the bearded man at Barbizon's, so she could not deny that the vile wretch was her husband, nor that he had deserted her and refused to provide for herself and her children. She had married him some ten years before, when he was working, or pretending to work, in a manufacturing establishment, but six months afterwards he had begun to beat and ill-treat her, and three years later he had disappeared, leaving her with a son and daughter to care for. However, Carnac could obtain little or no information from her respecting the persons in whom he was so deeply interested. She seemed unwilling to say much about her worthless husband ; besides, it was very evident that she knew very little about the life he had led since their separation. She saw or heard of him but rarely, and he carefully concealed his address from her. She fancied he lived at Montmartre, but she was by no means certain. Carnac did not neglect to question her in regard to Margot, but she assured him that she had never even heard of such a person, and she was evidently sincere.

Disappointed here, Carnac next directed his attention to Graindorge. He managed to meet that officer every day, and quite overpowered him with invitations, which the worthy fellow could accept but seldom on account of his duties. He stated that all inquiries about the former lover of Marie Bracieux, the murdered woman, had proved unavailing, and the investigation had not advanced a step. After hearing the testimony of Gerfaut, and that of the commissary of police and his subordinates, the investigating magistrate had no one left to examine, and the blind sculptor, the only victim who could complain, cared much more about assuring his daughter's happiness than securing his revenge.

The Count de Charny had gained the sculptor's consent to his daughter's speedy marriage, and the date of their departure for the East was fixed. Camille was happy, and her father also ; that is as far as possible after the catastrophe that had deprived him of sight. The count was a constant visitor, and was now usually received in the drawing-room, so that the studio was not as much frequented as in times past. Mademoiselle Gerfaut found she was too much exposed to intrusions there. Madame Stenay and her friend had not repeated their visit, it is true, but sculptors and artists

dropped in almost every day to condole with their unfortunate comrade. Annette Brunier, on the contrary, came but seldom, and her brother's visits had ceased entirely, so that most of Camille's time was spent in the society of her father and lover. It followed, therefore, that Carnac was obliged to remain in the studio alone, and this isolation, of which M. de Charny was the innocent cause, increased the young sculptor's animosity towards the nobleman. The much-talked-of visit to the Louvre had been postponed until the next Sunday, at the request of Marcel Brunier, who seemed to be really ill, but Carnac fondly hoped that before the day of their excursion arrived he would be able to inform Annette that Camille Gerfaut was released from the snare that had been set for her, and that her escape was due to his efforts.

As Madame de Carouge was to sing at Madame Stenay's, and as Carnac had had no opportunity of meeting her since her visit to Gerfaut's studio—that is, unless he had met her at the masquerade ball—he cheerfully acceded to his employer's request to form one of the party.

Madame Stenay had been married unquestionably, but she had been a widow so long that no one recollected her deceased husband. Some people said that he had been a banker; others declared that he had been a mere speculator; some even went so far as to say that he had been a usurer. At all events, he had left his widow a very comfortable fortune. Madame Stenay occupied a handsome flat in the Rue de Madrid, for which she paid a yearly rent of four thousand francs, and lived in all respects like a woman with an income of at least forty thousand francs.

Some persons ventured to insinuate that she increased this income of hers by engaging in a business which is both popular and lucrative in Paris, where matrimonial agencies abound; not that she kept an office where reliable information concerning marriageable heiresses was furnished, but because she cheerfully lent her assistance in bringing about suitable marriages between the gentlemen and ladies frequenting her soirées. Nor did she evince any desire to conceal this fact, though she would have been greatly incensed had any one hinted that she received a commission on the dowries of the young ladies whom her favourites married—thanks to her. She had certainly made a large number of matches, but they had all turned out well, and none of the interested parties had ever complained of having paid a broker's fee to ensure their happiness.

Madame Stenay did not operate in very exalted spheres. Her drawing-room was more especially the meeting place of well-to-do people of the middle classes and members of the artistic world. It seemed to be her mission to unite these two classes which usually show so little partiality for each other, for she had already married two painters, three pianists, a baritone, and four tenors to the daughters of rich merchants. It was as a tenor, and not as a nobleman, that M. de Charny was welcomed to her house, and as she liked him very much she had always cherished a hope of establishing him comfortably in life. So she talked a great deal about Camille Gerfaut, who would bring a dowry of more than a million francs to the man she chose for her husband. The count had succeeded in winning the heart of the sculptor's daughter, but Madame Stenay had certainly helped him not a little, for she had neglected no opportunity of enlarging upon his merits, or of enabling him to display his talent as a singer.

She was delighted to hear that the marriage had been decided upon, and on the evening when Madame de Carouge was to be heard for the first time in the drawing-room of the Rue de Madrid, Madame Stenay enthusi-

astically greeted M. and Mademoiselle Gerfaut, more especially the former, who had never been there before, but whom she hoped to convert into a constant visitor. She was also well pleased to see Carnac, whom she considered a pleasant, inoffensive fellow, and being a considerate hostess, she lost no time in introducing him to a brother artist named Fertugue, who never missed any of her soirées, and with whom the student of nature was already slightly acquainted. Gerfaut and his daughter were given seats near the piano, and Philippe de Charny of course never left them, so that Carnac was at liberty to go where he liked. He installed himself in a corner of the room where he could converse with his companion Fertugue without disturbing the performers, who were doing their best to amuse the company pending the arrival of the highly praised *prima donna*, who had not yet made her appearance, although it was ten o'clock.

The company had already endured a solo on the violoncello, and a quartette of amateurs had murdered a piece of classical music. A ferocious-looking pianist was now hammering out a sonata of his own composition, making such a noise that Gerfaut could not hear a single word of the conversation which was going on between Camille and her betrothed. The blind man was strongly tempted to stop up his ears, but he felt obliged to applaud occasionally for the sake of politeness.

"I admire Monsieur Gerfaut's fortitude," Fertugue remarked to Carnac, "he is dying to get to sleep. See him nod, and yet he fights against it with all his might. He even has the courage to give signs of approbation whenever that lunatic makes an unusually frantic effort to break the strings of his instrument."

"You don't seem to be very fond of music," rejoined the young sculptor.

"I think it is the most hideous and the most delightful of all sounds. Singing—good singing—is the sweetest thing in the world; but the piano is enough to drive one mad."

"Then why the deuce are you here?"

"I came this evening to hear this Marguerite de Carouge, whom Madame Stenay tells such wonderful things about."

"Have you ever heard her?"

"No, she is just from Russia; and I am afraid that we shall be terribly sold. I distrust these great artistes who have never sung in Paris."

"So do I. I allowed myself to be brought here by Monsieur Gerfaut, and had I not met you I should have been bored to death. But I believe you constantly attend this lady's entertainments?"

"Would you like to know why? It is simply because I wish to marry. I make a good living, but I am not rich, and there always used to be a large number of heiresses here. I have often wondered where Madame Stenay could have picked them up. But they are all disposed of now, and there is no longer any chance for me."

"There is at least one left."

"Who? Oh, you mean Gerfaut's daughter, I suppose. I admired her very much, but unfortunately some one got ahead of me, as you of course know, being her father's only pupil."

"Yes, she is going to marry the Count de Charny. That is settled, I believe."

"I should suppose so from appearances. He never leaves her side, Gerfaut ought not to let the fellow pay her such marked attention. It is true, that he is blind——"

"Oh, the count has bewitched the daughter, to whom the father is a perfect slave. It must be admitted that Charny is not a bad-looking fellow, but for all that I can't say that I like him."

"Nor do I. He is a regular ladies' man. He has languishing eyes, and he sings love songs in the most romantic manner, which you know is enough to turn any young girl's head; but for all that, I believe that Mademoiselle Gerfaut will have cause to repent it if she marries him."

"Do you know anything against him?" inquired Carnac, eagerly, determined to allow no opportunity for obtaining information to pass unimproved.

"Oh, he has neither stolen nor murdered any one, at least not that I know of," replied Fertugue, shrugging his shoulders, "but his social position is not very clearly defined."

"Is he a spurious count?"

"No; he comes of a very good family, and his title really belongs to him; but he does not affect the society of his equals, and that is always a bad sign."

"But he is rich. Gerfaut assures me that he has an income of twenty thousand francs."

"Possibly; but I should advise Gerfaut to be certain of that before he accepts the count as a son-in-law."

"Will you allow me to repeat what you have said to my employer?"

"Certainly; but you perhaps imagine that it is pique which impels me to say what I do. In that case you are much mistaken; and if you like, on leaving here, I will take you to a place where you can see for yourself that this Count de Charny does not lead an irreproachable life."

"What place do you mean?"

"I will tell you after the soirée is over. The piano is silent now, and we shall have to be silent as well, for here comes the singer—the celebrated Marguerite, who has been the sole topic of conversation for a fortnight past."

It was indeed Madame de Carouge who was just entering the room in a rich evening dress, with her head haughtily erect, and her bearing full of the dignity befitting a *prima donna*. Her eyes sparkled brilliantly, her hair shone like burnished copper in the bright light, and her low-necked dress displayed a pair of superb white shoulders. Madame Stenay hastened forward to meet her. A murmur of admiration ran through the room. One instinctively felt as if a queen had come to take possession of her kingdom, and the other musicians realised that their services would now be gladly dispensed with.

Carnac looked at her closely in the glare of the gaslight, and said to himself: "No, this certainly can't be Margot. This is one of Titian's beauties, who has just stepped down from her frame. Her movements are slow, her expression calm, almost phlegmatic. A woman like that never danced the can-can at the Elysée Montmartre." He saw her offer her hand to Camille, return M. de Charny's deferential bow with an air of polite reserve, and lavish upon Gerfaut marks of interest which seemed to touch the blind sculptor deeply. "Well, what do you think of her?" asked Carnac, turning to the artist whose homage Mademoiselle Gerfaut had disdained to accept.

"I think that hers is a peculiar and very striking style of beauty."

"Yes, she is unlike any person I have ever seen before."

"I should like to paint her portrait."

"And I should like to execute a bust of her. Monsieur Gerfaut can admire her only on trust, now he has lost his sight, but his daughter has said so much to him about Madame de Carouge that he is anxious to model the lady's head by the aid of the sense of touch. He proposed this to her, but she did not jump at his offer."

"Then this is not the first time you have seen her?"

"No, she was at the studio the other day."

"Introduce me to her, then."

"Impossible. I saw her, but did not exchange a word with her. She does not even know my name."

"Then I will ask Madame Stenay to present us to her. I am anxious to get a closer look at this queen of song."

The suggestion pleased Carnac, whose doubts were not entirely dispelled, and who was anxious to have a chance of satisfying them. "For if it is Margot," he said to himself, "she will certainly recognise my voice, and in that case she can hardly fail to betray some emotion when she hears me speak."

The entrance of the *prima donna* had created quite a sensation. All the guests had risen to their feet; those of minor importance were talking together in subdued tones in the corners of the room, while Madame de Carouge formed the centre of an admiring group, in which Gerfaut, his daughter, and his prospective son-in-law were prominent.

Madame Stenay was standing beside the new-comer, evidently delighted at the favourable impression she had made. She wore the satisfied, complacent air of a showman who is for the first time exhibiting some wonder of the animal or vegetable world; and it was very evident that she could hardly refrain from crying out: "Here, ladies and gentlemen, is the incomparable vocalist, just arrived from Russia. You will soon have an opportunity to hear her. Admire her beauty before you admire her talent."

Fertugue, less astonished than many of the guests, and not at all intimidated, stepped forward leading Jean Carnac, who, having less assurance than the fashionable portrait painter, seemed disposed to linger in the background. Madame Stenay perceived Fertugue approaching, and, as if understanding his desire, promptly exclaimed: "My dear Marguerite, allow me to introduce to you two distinguished artists: Monsieur Fertugue and Monsieur Carnac."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Monsieur Fertugue by reputation," replied Madame de Carouge, graciously, "and I have already had the pleasure of meeting Monsieur Carnac at Monsieur Gerfaut's studio. I am delighted to have an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with these gentlemen, and I hope they will kindly regard me as a comrade."

As she spoke, she gave a hand to each of them. Fertugue gallantly pressed a kiss upon the one offered to him: Carnac contented himself with shaking the other, and Gerfaut, who had heard his pupil's name, exclaimed: "Ah, lucky fellow! he can see you. Come, Carnac, pay madame a compliment, or I shall think that you do not appreciate your good fortune." Then, as Carnac, surprised and utterly disconcerted, seemed unable to stammer out even a word, the sculptor added: "You don't know how to pay a compliment, it appears. I expected as much, but you can at least thank me for having compelled you to come here this evening."

"I do thank you most sincerely," stammered the pupil of nature.

"You are not very profuse in your acknowledgments. I give you your cue, but you don't take it. You ought to state why you are grateful to

me, and that would give you an opportunity to compliment the lady. What is the matter with the boy? He is not usually so dumb. But pardon him, madame. He is a savage, and his silence is really a most eloquent tribute to your charms, for they seem to have turned his head completely."

"A more flattering tribute than the most honeyed words," replied Madame de Carouge, smiling, "but I trust that we shall become better acquainted, and that Monsieur Carnac will recover the use of his tongue."

Carnac did not recover it immediately, however. A chance remark made by his master had completed the poor fellow's discomfiture. By calling him a savage, Gerfaut had reminded him of his disguise at the masquerade ball, but the allusion had apparently not had the slightest meaning for the *prima donna*, for she continued to smile, and her countenance betrayed no emotion whatever.

"My dear madame," said Fertugue, who was very informal in his manner, "you certainly must not sing this evening."

"Why, pray?" inquired Madame de Carouge, evidently a little surprised.

"Because I am a painter, and no musician. You have a face which I should never tire of admiring. I would much rather gaze upon it all the evening than listen to your singing, for I have heard your talent so enthusiastically praised that I am afraid I shall be induced to listen to you rather than look at you."

"Then close your ears, and open your eyes," said the lady, gaily.

"No, I shall open both—and my heart as well."

"As you please; but I shall not enter. I should be afraid of finding too many occupants there already, and I do not like a crowd."

"Fertugue, my dear fellow, you talk too much, and Carnac talks too little," exclaimed Gerfaut. "One compensates for the other, it is true, but you are deferring my pleasure. Don't forget that I am blind, and that I have not—like you—the happiness of seeing Madame de Carouge. So allow me to be charmed by her voice, as she is kind enough to sing for an old heathen like myself."

"Say rather, two heathens, my dear friend," rejoined Fertugue; "I am no more of a musician than you are, alas! and I must be even less versed in such matters than yourself since I did not even know by reputation a great *prima donna* whose fame has spread throughout Europe."

This remark had a covert meaning which Madame de Carouge must have caught, for she quickly replied: "No one in Paris knows me. I left France when I was very young, and my musical education was acquired at Vienna, where I married, and where I resided until I had the misfortune of losing my husband, who had sunk his fortune in building railroads. I had been told that I possessed considerable musical talent, and I resolved to turn it to account; so I started for Russia to give a series of concerts there, and succeeded beyond my most sanguine hopes. My only ambition was to win an independence. That is acquired, and henceforth I shall only sing for my friends."

"And we are fortunate enough to be among the favoured ones, thanks to Madame Stenay," said Fertugue.

Again did Madame de Carouge detect the motive that had prompted the remark. "Madame Stenay has known me ever since I was a child. Her family was distantly connected with mine, and though we have been separated a long time we have never ceased to be fond of each other, and to keep up a correspondence—which is even more remarkable."

This was said so naturally that Carnac's last suspicion vanished. The tone, the choice of words, the manner, all were utterly unlike the language and bearing of the gipsy woman of the Elysée, the improbable Pepita, *première danseuse* of the Cadiz theatre. Besides, although he had looked with all his eyes, he could not discover the slightest scar on the singer's left cheek, nor had she started nor shown any sign of emotion on seeing or hearing him. Hence he concluded that Madame de Carouge was not Margot.

The mystery connected with the ring was still unsolved, however. It was certainly Madame de Carouge he had seen leaving the Mont-de-Piété, and if the ring belonged to the Count de Charney it followed that Madame de Carouge had a connection with him—a connection which they were both anxious should be kept a secret.

Carnac had the ring in his pocket, being unable to wear it as he had done at the Elysée, where people dance bare-handed. To attend Madame Stenay's soirée he had been obliged to put on gloves, which made him feel extremely uncomfortable, but which he dared not remove. Still less did he dare to question M. de Charney in regard to his crest and family motto; and even if he had ventured to take such a liberty, it was more than probable that the count would have refused to answer the question. It was necessary, therefore, to wait for a more favourable opportunity.

The group which had formed round the *prima donna* had dispersed, and she herself had taken a seat between Camille and M. de Charney. Gerfaut and Madame Stenay sat near her. They were all engaged in animated conversation, for it was impossible to take Madame de Carouge straight from the door to the piano, like a professional who is paid so much an evening for entertaining the company. Fertugue had taken care not to stray any distance from the auburn-haired beauty whose portrait he longed to paint; but Carnac had returned to his corner and his meditations. He was thinking of Annette Brunier, and he said to himself: "What is she doing at this moment? Working, probably, by the dim light of a cheap lamp, with no other diversion than thinking of the pleasure she will have next Sunday; and while she is wearing out her lovely eyes in making artificial flowers, Madame de Carouge is displaying her white shoulders in the drawing-room of this Madame Stenay, who looks exactly like my butcher's wife. Marcel Brunier, too, is in the depths of despair. He is in love with Camille, who does not even suspect that he cares for her. Why does she prefer a conceited coxcomb who is marrying her only for her money, I'll be bound, to a brave, kind-hearted, sensible fellow who would make her perfectly happy? Is it because he has a long silky moustache, or because his ancestors assisted in capturing Jerusalem, eight hundred years ago? It is too bad, upon my word! And to think that she is a sculptor's daughter, and that her father should have allowed himself to be duped by this swell! Ah, if I could only prevent them from committing an act of folly which will certainly cost them dear!"

Meanwhile, Madame de Carouge was preparing to sing. Several officious persons had already placed themselves at her orders, and were now engaged in searching the music rack for the piece she had chosen. Carnac watched these preparations, and was a little surprised to see the count rise at the same time as Madame de Carouge and accompany her to the piano. Everything seemed to indicate that they were about to sing a duet. A breathless silence pervaded the apartment. Madame de Carouge, who had announced her intention of playing her own accompaniment, seated herself at the

piano, and M. de Charny, having taken his place beside her, removed his gloves in order to turn the pages of the music-book with greater ease.

"There is a ring on his little finger," muttered Carnac, who was closely watching the count, "a plain gold ring with something that looks like a crest engraved upon it."

Carnac had excellent eyesight, but at such a distance he was unable to see the coat-of-arms engraved on the ring which glittered upon the count's finger, and though he longed to approach him he dared not do so. Under what pretext could he venture to walk to the piano? Certainly not under pretext of turning over the leaves, for he did not know a note of music, and besides, the count performed his task very well unaided. The young sculptor's reflections were interrupted by the opening notes of the duet. Madame de Carouge evidently did not care for the popular music of the day, for she had selected from Meyerbeer's "Prophète" a duet well adapted both to her voice and M. de Charny's. She possessed a magnificent contralto, and she certainly would have acquitted herself not uncreditably of the difficult part of Fidès, created by Madame Viardot. The count, on his side, had a delightful tenor voice, and the part of Jean de Leyde, composed for Roger, might have been written for him, so admirably did it suit him. It really almost seemed as if Madame de Carouge had known the air that would best suit them both; and this was the more remarkable as she could never have heard M. de Charny sing before, and she did not appear to have consulted him in the selection.

They acquitted themselves in a most creditable manner, though the music was very difficult. Madame de Carouge, in particular, evinced great musical talent. She sang with all the power, expression, and passion of an experienced *prima donna*. M. de Charny, on the contrary, sang like a man of the world who does not care to emulate professionals, but his voice had all the charm and almost the range of that poor Roger's whose memory is still fresh in the hearts of many of our seniors. Camille was not old enough to make the comparison, but it was very evident that her lover's impassioned singing went straight to her heart.

"She is completely infatuated," thought Carnac, who did not lose sight of her, although his attention was chiefly bestowed upon the vocalists. "It is as well that Marcel did not come. He would have suffered too much. And just to think that it is only necessary to sing well to win a woman's love! Ah, if I were a tenor I would go and serenade Mademoiselle Brunier every night. But unfortunately I should not even be allowed to act as a chorister in a country church. But Mademoiselle Brunier is not like other young ladies, perhaps."

All the guests were charmed, and the duet ended amid a storm of applause; even Carnac clapped his hands, though he did not care much about classical music as a general thing. "What do you think of the singers?" inquired Fertugue, who had quietly approached him.

"I think they both possess a great deal of talent," replied the student of nature. "The count sings as though he had done nothing else all his life; and as for Madame de Carouge, it is very evident that she understands her business."

"Do you really think so? I cannot say that I agree with you. The one who really knows how to sing is Charny. It would not surprise me in the least to hear that he was once a professional singer. As for Madame de Carouge, despite all her flourishes she knows nothing whatever about the science of music. She sings by instinct. She has a superb contralto,

but I am sure that she scarcely knows the scale, and then she is absolutely ignorant of the first principles of the art of managing the voice. Hers is a very powerful one, but she gives too much scope to it; in short, she abuses it. She would be wonderfully successful in garden concerts, and though she hardly equals the celebrated Theresa, she reminds me a little of her; however, I suppose that Madame de Carouge would not feel flattered by the comparison. She has higher aspirations."

"Aspirations justified by the success she achieved in Russia, where she made a fortune in less than two years," remarked Carnac.

"Are you sure of that? Now I have heard her, I am inclined to think her triumphs rather doubtful, and her fortune also. I am a thorough sceptic, and I should not be surprised if there was not a word of truth in the story the lady told us."

"In that case, how does it happen that Madame Stenay acts as her patroness? She must be acquainted with the facts of the case."

"That is by no means certain. Madame Stenay is not very fastidious respecting her acquaintances. Provided they appear respectable, she does not trouble herself much about their antecedents. Moreover she has a mania for match-making, and she perhaps cherishes a hope of marrying this fair Marguerite to one of us."

"Not to me, I hope."

"Nor to me, though I should not object to having her as a model. Monsieur de Charny might suit her, though he is a little young for her; but he is already engaged, and I fancy that if this tenor and contralto married each other with the expectation of bettering themselves financially they would be terribly sold."

"Yes; you told me a while ago that you did not believe Monsieur de Charny was really in receipt of the income he claims to possess."

"I not only told you so, but I offered you a chance of judging for yourself. Are you very anxious to remain here until the close of the entertainment. Gerfaut doesn't need you. His daughter and his intended son-in-law are here to look after him; besides, he won't return home on foot, I suppose."

"No; his terrible experience on the night of his return from the Grand Hôtel will prevent that."

"I heard about his accident. It was certainly terrible. Still, he is a man of means, and it was better that the calamity should have happened to him than to some poorer artist. If I become blind I shall have to take my stand on a bridge with a dog and a flute. Nevertheless, it is pretty hard on Gerfaut, who will now be unable to finish his statue for the show. I must do him the justice to say that he bears his affliction very bravely. But see, Madame de Carouge is going to sing again. I have had enough music for one evening; suppose we steal off quietly before the conclusion of the song?"

Carnac did not reply at once. He was still watching the count, and had just noticed a fact that had previously escaped him. The ring glittered like an ornament that had been worn very little, if at all. It was evidently almost new.

"Can it be that it was bought to replace another—the one which was in pawn?" Carnac said to himself. "Did he purchase this one on learning that the old one was lost? It seems to me that he did not have a ring on his fingers the last time I saw him at the studio. I should not have failed to notice it had he worn one, for I recollect that he took off his gloves when he shook hands with Gerfaut and his daughter."

"Well, my dear fellow, you are, of course, at liberty to stay and enjoy the music an hour or two longer," repeated Fertugue, "but I have had enough of it, and I am going."

Carnac remembered M. Fertugue's promise to show him the count under a new aspect, and that decided him. The two artists slipped out of the room; and when they had reached the street, the young sculptor turned to his companion, and said: "Where are you going to take me?"

"If I told you now you might refuse to accompany me, for you are not without your prejudices."

"I!" exclaimed Carnac. "It is very evident that you don't know me. I go everywhere, and I could take you to every drinking shop on the outer boulevard with my eyes shut."

"Thanks, I'll not trouble you. I should not enjoy myself particularly there, nor should we meet Monsieur de Charny. Let me act as the guide, if you wish to be enlightened respecting the life that nobleman leads."

"Very well, lead on. I am no greenhorn, whatever you may think; besides, to learn the true character of the man my worthy master's daughter is about to marry, I would willingly spend the night in the haunt of the vilest thieves and assassins."

"You won't be called upon to do that. We are only going to pass an hour or two in a magnificently-furnished establishment, where the choicest viands are served free of charge."

"That suits me, for I am not exactly rolling in gold, although I drew my month's salary this morning. I have just sixty francs left to live upon until the first of March. I received one hundred, but forty francs had to go to pay my debts."

"So much the better. If you had much money in your pocket I should advise you to go quietly home. But speaking of assassins, has the murderer of the woman who was hanged in the Rue de l'Elysee des Beaux Arts, and whose litter poor Gerfaut so foolishly consented to bear, ever been discovered?"

"Then you are acquainted with the particulars of the crime?"

"Yes, the commissary of police told me about it. I was painting a portrait of his daughter at the time of the murder. He even told me that, at first, he thought of arresting Gerfaut as an accomplice. That would have been pretty hard on our friend, especially as he had already lost his sight."

"He would have had no difficulty in clearing himself. He is very well known, and every one who is acquainted with him is aware that he would not harm a mouse."

"I am sure of that, and so far as I myself am concerned I would rather spend ten years in prison than lose my sight. I pity Gerfaut with all my heart, and if I question you on the subject it is only because I have a particular reason for doing so. I reside on the Boulevard de Clichy, in a house which has three or four small courtyards behind it, and my windows command a view of the vacant house in which the murder was committed. I informed the commissary of the fact, but I could tell him nothing more, as I have never seen any one in or about the house during the five years I have lived in the neighbourhood. Still, I have often met the poor woman who was murdered. In fact, I used to give her a few pennies occasionally, and sometimes stop and talk with her. She was a strange creature."

"She was once an actress, was she not?"

"Yes, and she had been well off, with bonds and shares and a banking

account. But it seems she lavished everything upon a heartless, unprincipled lover, and though she was afterwards compelled to beg her bread, she still adored the scoundrel who had basely deserted her, after reducing her to abject poverty."

"I have heard these facts stated before. You know the commissary, and I know one of the policemen Gerfaut summoned."

"The policeman probably told you this after the investigation began; but he could not have told you that the poor creature still cherished a hope that her lover would return to her. She told me so herself. But it was in vain that I asked her, over and over again, to tell me her lover's name. Do you know what she always said in reply?"

"I can guess."

"She invariably answered: 'He has wronged me deeply, but that is nobody's business but my own, and I don't complain. Besides, I am sure that he will return to me some day, sooner or later, and then he shall have no cause to blame me for having degraded him in the eyes of the world.' But though this Bracieux woman was so careful not to compromise the scoundrel, she did not scruple to curse a certain Margot, who had taken her lover from her."

"Margot!" exclaimed Carnac, in profound astonishment. "Margot with the scar?"

"I can't say whether the damsel was thus disfigured or not, as the beggar woman never told me; but I do know that she tried her best to find her rival, so that she might tear her eyes out. Of course, she did not find her, and you should have heard her deplore the fact, and breathe vengeance upon the culprit. 'She had better keep out of my way,' the Bracieux woman would cry, gesticulating like a lunatic. 'If I ever meet her, I will tear her breast open with my teeth to see if she has a heart!' It was equal to a thrilling melo-drama. Whenever I encouraged her a little, she added: 'The vile wretch is hiding; she is afraid of me. But the day of vengeance is coming. She is in my power; I have proofs of her guilt in my possession. I will yet denounce her as a thief and as a forger. The only reason I haven't done so before is that my lover has unfortunately become infatuated with her, and I am afraid of compromising him, though he had no hand in the crimes I speak of.'"

"Did you tell the commissary all this?" interrupted Carnac, who had been aroused to a state of extraordinary excitement by this narrative.

"No, indeed," replied Fertugue. "What would have been the use of repeating such nonsense as this—the mere ravings of a madwoman—for Mother Bracieux, as we called her, was really half crazy. Besides, I suspect that she drank more brandy than was good for her."

"Didn't it occur to you that this unknown lover of hers and this girl Margot might have killed the poor woman to prevent her from disclosing the secrets she boasted of possessing?"

"No; I am quite wanting in the instinct peculiar to detectives. But you may be right; and in that case it must have been Margot who destroyed Gerfaut's eyesight."

"Unquestionably; for the vitriol was thrown by a woman, and we are sure, of it for a scrap of her dress was found in the door behind which she was hiding."

"I understand now why the information I have just given you interests you so deeply. You wish to avenge our worthy Gerfaut. I should be glad to assist in the work myself. Would you like me to go to the commissary

and tell him all I know about the interested parties? I am afraid it will not do much good, but if you think otherwise——”

“I think that the first thing to be done is to find Margot.”

“You seem to think that an easy matter, but where the deuce will you look for a woman whom nobody knows?”

“There are persons who won't fail to recognise her.”

“Bah! where are they?”

Carnac hesitated. He longed to take Fertugue into his confidence, but he felt that such a step would not only be premature but dangerous, for the painter was very thoughtless, and might unintentionally do something that would seriously imperil the success of the undertaking. “I mean that there are persons who used to know her,” he finally answered. “She disappeared several years ago, but she is still remembered by frequenters of the public balls. I attend them occasionally myself; and if she should return I shan't be long finding it out.”

“I am glad the task of looking for her falls upon you instead of me. It is a job I shouldn't fancy; besides, I have something else to do. Still, if I can be of any assistance to you, I shall be quite at your service. In the meantime, I will gladly enlighten you respecting the habits of Monsieur de Charny. It will be a service rendered to Monsieur Gerfaut, who has been imprudent enough to promise his daughter's hand to that nobleman. But here we are at the end of our journey. Do you see that brilliantly-lighted door on the other side of the street, a little further down? That's the place. It is no doubt very respectable in appearance, but it is not well to trust to appearances. You know the proverb, ‘All is not gold that glitters.’”

“I am aware that this proverb is often exemplified in Paris,” replied Carnac; “but I don't know what these dazzling lights indicate. Some theatre, perhaps, which is the count's favourite resort.”

“In that case I should not have brought you here, for as Monsieur de Charny is not yet Gerfaut's son-in-law he has a perfect right to flirt with an actress if he chooses. I must confess that I am not very well informed about his habits; he probably has several vices, and I know only one.”

“And what is that?”

“He is a gambler; and so he comes to this gambling den.”

“What! is this stylish building a gambling-house?”

“One of the fashionable kind. When a person wishes to be polite he calls it a club. The Count de Charny is one of its oldest members, having been connected with it from the very beginning, and he comes here every night unless he is dead broke. There are all sorts of people among the members of the club: turfmen, book-makers, shopkeepers, noblemen, and even politicians. It is the rendezvous of those who have lost caste.”

“You forget that you belong to it yourself.”

“Oh, I come here principally to watch the fun, though I like a game at times. I lose what I can afford to lose, and then amuse myself by watching those who are more unfortunate than myself. It is great fun to see them tear their hair and curse their ill-luck.”

“I don't doubt it; but I am not a member of this brilliant circle, so I have no right to enter.”

“Oh, any one can enter the club-house provided he is brought by a member. You will have to inscribe your name upon a register. I will place my name below yours to show that I am responsible for you, and that is all. Understand, too, that you are not obliged to play. Indeed, I would strongly advise you not to do so.”

"You need have no fears. That is not my object in coming."

"No; you come to get an insight into the real character of Monsieur de Charny, who plays the saint before his betrothed and future father-in-law, but who spends his nights in reckless gambling. I have known him to lose fifty thousand francs at a sitting."

"And he tells Gerfaut that he is devoting himself to historical researches."

"He is often searching for funds, and generally in vain. I have seen him reduced to offering a five-franc piece as his stake. Of late, however, he has been very lucky, for he displays a pocket-book full of bank-notes; but he is subject to such vicissitudes of fortune that none of the employes would lend him a franc if he needed it. His marriage will greatly improve his credit."

"And this is the use he intends to make of Camille Gerfaut's dowry? He will be disappointed, I fancy, for I shall certainly warn my employer, and I thank you for bringing me here, for I want to be able to say that I have seen him gambling with my own eyes—this pink of propriety, who sings so charmingly, and who pretends to divide his time between vocal music and the national archives. Heaven grant that he will make his appearance to-night as usual."

"You need have no fears. Madame Stenay's soirée will be over at about midnight, and Monsieur de Charny will be here half an hour afterward. That is about the time he generally arrives, and he usually stays until morning."

"But if he sees me, he will refrain from playing, perhaps. For he knows that I am Gerfaut's pupil, and that I am on intimate terms with both the father and daughter; he knows, too, that I am no admirer of his, so I should not be surprised if he leaves as soon as he sees me."

"Still, you will have the satisfaction of saying that you saw him here. Besides, you can tell Gerfaut all I have told you, and all you will hear said about him here, for the count and his exploits at the gaming-table are the principal topics of conversation. I trust you will also have the pleasure of seeing this nobleman take part in a game, for there will be a crowd here, as usual, and it will be an easy matter for you to keep out of sight. Here we are at the door. Come in, my dear fellow."

Escorted by Fertugue, Carnac traversed a vestibule guarded by a majestic porter, ascended an imposing staircase, and on reaching the ante-room, handed his hat and overcoat to a liveried footman as calmly and indifferently as if he were in the habit of being thus served. The register was kept in an apartment adjoining the card-room, and after the formality of registering had been complied with, they were greeted with a gracious "Now, gentlemen, make yourselves at home" from the manager, a little, shrivelled-up old fellow, who was said to have been engaged in the Brazilian slave trade, and to have afterwards kept a gambling-hell in California.

"Well, what is the prospect this evening, Cambron?" inquired Fertugue.

"Pretty fair," replied Cambron, furtively examining Carnac, in order to judge of his financial standing, "although the majority of the players seem rather timid. The prince had a remarkable run of luck last night, and they dare not start out too rashly; but they will get braver when Charny comes. He has been winning all the week, and when he is in luck he makes things lively. I won't wish you good luck, or your friend either for they say it brings about the reverse."

Fertugue passed on, and Carnac followed him, considerably surprised

by the old man's free-and-easy manner. "Am I to understand that princes really come here?" he inquired of his companion.

"The person Cambron referred to is a retired grocer," sneered the painter. "The title of prince has been bestowed upon him because he is the heaviest player in the club."

The friends now entered a large room hung with crimson silk, in the centre of which stood an immense oval table. A dozen or more gentlemen were seated round this table, and about twenty more stood behind them. A seedy croupier sat opposite the banker—a fat, red-faced, vulgar-looking man, who was dealing the cards with a nonchalant air, probably to indicate the scorn he felt for the insignificant amounts staked. "That is the prince," said Fertugue, "his name is Piochard or Pitauchard, I forget which. But look over there, near the mantelpiece; do you see that man who looks like a cathedral beadle, and who wears a bright rosette in his button-hole. That is Major La Bernache, the umpire of the establishment. He is lodged and fed, found in fuel and lights, and even has his washing done at the expense of the establishment, to say nothing of his profits. He is talking now with young Vermandois, the principal drummer of the club."

"But what do you mean by a drummer?"

"Charny could explain better than I can, for he has served in that capacity, at least so people say. He is the person to whom the task of bringing in rich recruits is entrusted—no easy task, by the way. The drummer must not only possess a great deal of tact, but he must have, or he must have had, a good position in society, and still be on friendly terms with men who have plenty of money, and who are fond of card-playing. He must meet with such persons on the boulevard or elsewhere, as if by chance, take them familiarly by the arm, and say to them: 'My dear fellow, why don't you join the Club de la Concorde? The playing there is something worth seeing. Three banks were broken there last night, and the players had over a hundred thousand francs to divide between them. The company is a little mixed, perhaps, but there's no cheating. When shall I take you there?' The hungry fish snaps at the bait, and the task is accomplished."

"And did you say that the Count de Charny had acted in this capacity?"

"I said that I had been so informed; however, I never saw him discharging these functions. I only joined the club about a month ago, and he seems to have been more than usually prosperous of late. He holds his head pretty high now, but I have been told that no later than last year he assisted Vermandois in gathering recruits. Vermandois is, like Monsieur de Charny, a well-born fellow, who has squandered his fortune, and they both hate each other most cordially—a case of professional jealousy, probably."

"That is a fact worth knowing," muttered Carnac. "Possibly this Vermandois might be able to give me some information in regard to the count's past life."

"Very probably," replied Fertugue; "but I can't introduce you to him, for I have not even a speaking acquaintance with him. I don't care to know people of that stamp. I think it is quite enough to come here and risk a little money and you had better follow my example. But look, there is another interesting personage—that tall fellow who is handing a letter to the illustrious Piochard. That is Auguste, the banker of the club."

"What, the banker? Why, he wears a footman's livery!"

"That is his real office, but he has another which is infinitely more

lucrative. He lends money to unlucky people—not by the week, but by the day. If he lends a thousand francs one day, he receives a thousand and twenty before night on the morrow. In this way, Auguste often makes ten louis a day. He is in a fair way to becoming a capitalist, and it will not be long before he is promoted to Cambron's position."

"Do his debtors never play him false?"

"That would be too much to expect. He gets caught sometimes, of course; but all bankers are liable to such misfortunes. They seldom overtake Auguste, however. He is very cautious; and besides, in some inexplicable way he manages to acquire a pretty thorough knowledge of his clients' antecedents and prospects. By the way, he would be the very person to tell you all you wish to know about Monsieur de Charny. But he wouldn't do it; at least, not just now, for Charny is in luck. He is winning now; and so Auguste respects him and treats him with the utmost deference. But you won't need to question Auguste. All you have to do is to tell the father and daughter that Monsieur de Charny is a confirmed gambler, and that he spends his nights at the *baccarat* table."

"They are so infatuated with him that they won't believe me."

"Then you must furnish them with proofs, and I will assist you in that, if you like. We shall have no great difficulty in procuring them. When is the wedding to take place?"

"Next week."

"The deuce! we haven't much time to lose. You must proceed as you think proper: in the meantime I will make inquiries and promptly apprise you of what I learn. There may be something new this very night. It is getting late, and it can't be long now before Charny makes his appearance."

The two friends now approached the table and proceeded to amuse themselves by watching the game without taking any part in it. Carnac had but a very vague idea of *baccarat*, and did not always understand why one side lost and the other won; but he enjoyed watching the faces and gestures of the players, who were all more or less exasperated by the persistency with which luck went against them. Many an oath and insulting word was addressed to the banker, who seemed to trouble himself very little on the matter. Two players, who were either more unlucky or more irascible than the others, had already torn up their cards. All were playing excitedly, with their eyes riveted upon Piochard in the hope of discovering whether he had a good or bad hand. Every countenance expressed the grossest cupidity, and even a sort of brutal ferocity; so that, in spite of the silken hangings and the rich Turkey carpet, when Carnac mentally compared this sumptuous establishment with the more plebeian cafés he frequented, he decided in favour of the latter. "There," he mused, "the players only think of winning their drinks, while here they look as if they contemplated strangling the banker and robbing their companions."

The game was drawing to a close, and the prince dealt the cards with a weary air. "If you go on in this fashion, gentlemen," he said coarsely, "I warn you that I shall leave. It is not worth while for me to tire myself out picking up six or seven louis at a time."

"Each evening's work must yield you two or three hundred thousand francs to satisfy you, I suppose," growled one of the players.

"Stake something worth staking, or I'll stop playing. This is a mere farce."

"Five hundred louis!" exclaimed some one at this moment.

Carnac was standing with his back to the door, so that he could not

see the persons entering the room, but he instantly recognised the voice as that of M. de Charny. He had the presence of mind not to turn, however. The count, had he found himself face to face with Gerfaut's pupil, would almost surely have beaten a retreat, and the chance of seeing him deeply absorbed in a game of *baccarat* might be lost for ever. So Carnac concealed himself as well as he could among the players who were standing around the table; and Fertugue, after giving him a warning nudge, quietly stole away. He, too, was anxious to avoid notice, fearing that his presence might prevent M. de Charny from indulging freely in his favourite pastime. The unsophisticated young sculptor wondered what was the exact meaning of the words he had heard, but he was soon enlightened on the subject. Philippe de Charny passed by without seeing him, and flung a roll of ten one-thousand-franc notes upon the table.

"So you have come at last, my dear fellow," growled Piochard, slightly disconcerted by this unexpected challenge. "You are late this evening. I had had almost enough of playing for nothing, and was about to leave. Do you expect to frighten me with your paltry five hundred louis?"

"I only wish to know if you will take my bet," replied the count, with Jove-like calmness.

"Certainly; and after you have lost these louis I will take five hundred more if you have them to spare."

"Very well. Deal, if you please."

In his heart and soul Piochard hated the swell who treated him in such a supercilious manner, and who for a fortnight past had enjoyed such a wonderful run of good luck that the ex-grocer seemed likely to lose his title of *Prince of Baccarat*. He disliked to accept the challenge, but he dared not refuse in the presence of the men he had just despoiled, so he shrugged his shoulders and began to deal. There was a profound silence, amid which the sound of his heavy breathing was distinctly audible. He was literally panting with anxiety. Charny remained apparently unmoved, though the loss of so large a sum was certainly of more importance to him than to his wealthy antagonist. "Eight," cried Piochard, spreading his cards out upon the table.

The count did not flinch. He had been unable to take up his cards himself on account of the distance that separated him from the table, and he now waited with perfect calmness until the gentleman who had his hand could examine the cards, and not a muscle of his face moved when this gentleman, in a transport of delight, announced: "Nine!"

Piochard uttered an oath, and dealt the table a blow with his clenched hand that made it tremble. "Take care or you will hurt yourself," said one of his neighbours ironically—a merchant who had recently failed for the third time.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," shouted Piochard. "Do you think it so amusing to lose on a single bet twice as much as one has won in a whole evening from misers like you?"

"Enough, enough! you are delaying the game," cried several voices in chorus.

"Don't be so hasty, my dear fellow," expostulated Major La Bernache. "We are not in a grogshop; and if you gentlemen are so violent, card-playing will be tabooed here. When a person can't lose his money like a gentleman, he ought not to play."

"I will do what I like. I want no instructions from you."

"Do you propose to act as banker any longer?" coldly inquired the

count, who had not picked up the notes which the croupier pushed towards him.

"Yes," yelled Piochard, "and when this money goes, there will be some more to take its place."

"Very well. *Banco*, then."

"I will only stake the amount that is on the table."

"You have barely twenty-five thousand francs left," rejoined M. de Charny. "Well, here they are," he added, throwing five more bank-notes upon the table.

Carnac witnessed this scene with mingled wonder and admiration for the handsome Philippe's coolness. "He must have millions!" thought the unsophisticated sculptor, "and he seems likely to win a fortune in addition. If I had the ten thousand francs he has just won from that coarse brute, I would run and ask Marcel Brunier for his sister's hand without any loss of time."

This time the result was the same as on the previous occasion. The spectators loudly applauded, and the dethroned prince became furiously angry. "I am not such a fool, for I see that I am playing the part of a dupe here," he exclaimed, in a voice husky with rage.

"What do you mean by those words, Monsieur Piochard?" inquired the count, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I mean that I am tired of playing banker. At least, I am tired of enriching you."

"You tire very quickly. It is evident that you don't possess much power of endurance. Very well, I will take the bank."

"Take it; but you won't get any more of my money. I shan't bet against you."

"So much the better. I am not anxious to play with ill-bred people."

Piochard swallowed the insult. It affected him much less than the loss he had just undergone. M. de Charny had already taken possession of the seat vacated by the ex-grocer, and while the croupier opened three packs of fresh cards, he occupied himself in counting his winnings. Carnac watched him closely, keeping as much out of sight as possible. The count had not yet noticed him. Fertugue touched Carnac on the arm, and whispered softly: "I am willing to bet a handsome sum that this fine bird who warbles so sweetly will leave some of his feathers here on this green table. He has just won a large amount, and this has intoxicated him. When his success is at its height it will be time for us to show ourselves, you especially. We will see what a face he'll make then."

"Very well; but I don't wish to play, and yet I can't ask the persons round the table to make room for me unless I do."

"Bah! Risk a napoleon."

"Never. I have only three."

"I will lend you one; besides, I will guarantee that you will win. I will indicate the right moment."

Carnac made no reply, but he was strongly tempted to follow the artist's advice. He was at least wise enough to wait, and it was well that he did so, for M. de Charny's career as a banker began by a series of victories, and his discomfited opponents discovered, when too late, that in applauding sweet-spoken Philippe for taking the place of foul-mouthed Piochard, they had been as foolish as the frogs in the fable, who begged for a king. Each deal was greeted with a chorus of imprecations in which the ex-grocer joined, for in spite of his vow he had been staking thousand-

franc notes one after another, all of them having gone to swell the pile accumulating in front of the banker.

"It seems to me that your presentiments are not likely to be verified," whispered Carnac to his friend.

"The game isn't over," replied Fertugue, in the same tone. "We'll wait for the luck to change, but meanwhile take these two red chips, each of which represents twenty francs. I received them in exchange for gold from the steward a few moments ago, for I intend to go shares with you, though it is you who must do the betting, in accordance with my instructions, of course. I am sure we shall win. Fortune always favours beginners."

However, luck had not yet ceased to smile upon M. de Charny. Piochard had emptied his pocket-book; and he seemed to have lost his senses completely, for he called out: "Auguste, bring me five thousand francs."

"Certainly, certainly, prince," replied the waiter, for he knew very well that the loan would be repaid with heavy interest on the morrow. "Give me time to go to the safe and return."

The count went on playing with the same extraordinary success. Nearly all the members of the club had now assembled around the table, and were eagerly watching this duel between the nobleman and the plebeian. Vermandois, who was not taking any part in the game, but whose sympathies were with Poichard, for the latter frequently lent him money, was fairly disgusted with the "prince's" rout. "What luck Charny has!" he remarked, aloud. "Is it due to his hands? He certainly ought to change his ancestral device."

Carnac pricked up his ears on hearing this unexpected remark; but M. de Charny replied coldly, though quietly: "Let my ancestors rest in peace, if you please. I don't trouble myself much about yours, for I have never even thought of inquiring if you are a descendant of the old Counts of Vermandois or not."

"Oh, don't take offence, my dear fellow. I really don't understand why you should be incensed with me for repeating your family motto: '*Neither chariot nor steed; nothing but my arm.*' However, if I were in your place, I would change the last part, and substitute '*nothing but my hands.*'"

The count turned pale with anger at the insinuation.

"I am only joking, of course," sneered Vermandois.

"Have done with your joking, and go on with the game," said Piochard, savagely, flourishing the bank-notes which had just been given him by Auguste. "I'll bet fifty louis on both the right and the left."

"Now's your time," whispered Fertugue. "Put one chip on the right, and stand out in plain sight."

Carnac needed no urging now. He would willingly have lost a whole year's salary to unmask Gerfaut's intended son-in-law, so he pushed past two players who had just lost their last penny, and who consequently made no attempt to impede his progress, and placed one of the red chips, that Fertugue had slipped into his hand, on the table. Upon which side did he place it? He knew or cared little, provided he showed himself to the count, so he dropped it as near as he could to him. The half-sneering, half-jesting remark made by Vermandois had just convinced the student of nature that the ring picked up at the Mont-de-Piété had really belonged to handsome Philippe, and the moment for action seemed to have come.

M. de Charny, who was about to deal the cards again, saw Carnac, recognised him at a glance, and turned perceptibly paler. "Have you made your bets, gentlemen?" he inquired to conceal his emotion.

"Where are your eyes? Can't you see for yourself?" asked Piochard, savagely. "Go ahead. We didn't come here to chatter like a lot of magpies." Then, seeing that the count seemed to hesitate, the retired grocer remarked, sneeringly: "One would think that you were afraid."

"Of you? Oh, no. You are a great bore; but you have never frightened any one."

He proceeded to deal the cards; but Carnac noticed that his hand trembled, and it certainly could not be the fear of losing that thus unnerved such a veteran *baccarat* player. There was some doubt at first, and each player was obliged to draw; but the final result was unfavourable to the banker. Piochard pocketed two thousand francs, and a red chip fell upon the chip ventured by Carnac.

"Leave them there," whispered Fertugue. "The spell is broken, and luck is going to change. In a little time this illustrious nobleman will lose his last penny."

Carnac had not even thought of withdrawing his stakes. He was deeply absorbed in watching Camille's betrothed, and it afforded him infinite satisfaction to see that this illustrious personage was becoming more and more disturbed in mind. M. de Charny's pallor, the twitching of the muscles of his face, and his nervous movements, all indicated that he realised but too well the disastrous consequences which might result from his meeting with a man devoted to the sculptor whose fortune he coveted. Once more the banker lost; and Piochard, having bet very heavily, the loss proved a serious one. One would have fancied that the sudden appearance of Carnac had brought bad luck to the brilliant Philippe, and as gamblers are invariably superstitious, the same thought occurred to each of the party. So they began to regard Carnac with a friendly eye, and would have anathematised him strongly had he withdrawn from the game at this juncture. Carnac quite forgot that he had any money on the table, and stood with his eyes fixed upon the count as if trying to stare him out of countenance. Fertugue had firm faith in his friend's success, his confidence being based upon the axiom that the first time a man plays he is sure to win, so he took good care not to call his attention to stakes which he hoped to see quadrupled. Just at that moment a gleam of reason flashed upon Charny's mind. He, too, was a firm believer in the infallible success of beginners at the gaming-table, and he said to himself that it would be as well for him to retire from the contest before his handsome winnings became still further diminished, so he said: "Gentlemen, obstinacy is the least of my faults. I see that luck is against me, and it is useless to think of trying to stem the tide. Let some one take my place."

"Ah, ha, so you want to back out!" sneered Piochard, "and just because you happen to have been worsted a couple of times. It is very shabby behaviour on your part, I think, not to give us our revenge; and I don't hesitate to say that I will never bet against you again as long as I live. I should be a fool, indeed, if I consented to risk my money against a bank that can't stand five minutes' run upon it."

The count was cut to the quick and resumed his seat, remarking drily: "Master Piochard, if you and I were the only persons present, your gross impertinence would not prevent me from leaving the table, if only for the sake of getting rid of your very objectionable company; but

I am unwilling to deprive these gentlemen of the chance of retrieving their losses, so I will go on. Will you stake an amount equal to that in the bank?"

"We will see about that presently," replied the prince. "Just now I will content myself with staking four thousand on the right."

It was at this end of the table that chance had deposited the first chip ventured by Carnac, and chance had favoured our friend, for this side had steadily won while the other lost. The count was again obliged to pay over a large amount, but he did so without flinching. He had resolved to go on until the end, having ceased to trouble himself respecting what Carnac might report to his master. The demon of play had regained complete possession of him. Carnac, seeing the count going straight on to ruin with such superb indifference, began to pity, in fact almost to admire him. "He plays as if the money did not belong to him," he thought.

"Don't move. We have him now," whispered Fertugue.

"Bravo!" cried Vermandois. "That is what I call a fine player. It is in this way that a man lures fortune back. Listen to Charny's war-cry, 'nothing but my hands.'"

The count glowered on the speaker, and Piochard growled: "You had better hold your tongue. How much does Charny pay you for chanting his praises?"

"Hush, can't you!" whispered Vermandois, in reply. "Don't you see that I am only urging him on? He is as proud as a peacock, and he would rather risk the very clothes on his back than stop playing now."

Carnac suddenly recollected the ring in his waistcoat pocket. "The count little suspects that I have the means of ruining him in my possession," he said to himself. "No later than to-morrow I shall ask Monsieur Gerfaut what he thinks of my prize, and his intended son-in-law's habits. If I could succeed in getting him to show this rascal the door it would be the happiest day of my life. Mademoiselle Camille would not thank me at first, but she would finally be induced to listen to reason, especially if I could succeed in convincing her that her Philippe is in league with Madame de Carouge. In that case, there will be some hope for Marcel Brunier."

The game went on with varying success. The left side won occasionally, and as Piochard sometimes bet on it, the bank managed to maintain itself; but the right side remained invulnerable. There had now been nine deals, and as it had been victorious in every case, Carnac's chip was now entirely hidden by a pile of bank-notes, which Fertugue saw steadily increasing with suppressed joy. More than once already he had asked himself if it would not be as well to warn the young sculptor, who seemed to have no suspicion of his good fortune, and to bid him pocket his money. But instinct told him that the run of luck was not yet over, and that it would be advisable to make the most of an opportunity which was not likely to present itself again. However, at last he came to the conclusion that he could not take the responsibility of allowing Carnac to run the risk of losing winnings that already amounted to a snug little fortune, and he was about to say as much, when he saw one of the players slyly endeavouring to slip into the pile several chips belonging to himself. Fertugue instantly divined his intentions, and said to him in a clear and distinctly audible voice: "Excuse me, that pile belongs to my friend. Keep your own chips and let him alone."

The man seemed inclined to protest, but Major La Bernache interfered,

and from his decision there was no appeal. "The pile belongs to that gentleman," he said, pointing to Carnac, who opened his eyes wide, like a person who had just been aroused from a dream.

"There is no question about that!" cried Piochard, placing his money on the other side. "But let us make haste. I warn the count that the stakes greatly exceed the sum of money in front of him."

"I accept the bet, nevertheless," replied Philippe de Charny, coldly.

"My dear fellow, I think it would be as well for you to withdraw at least a portion of your winnings," whispered Fertugue.

Carnac only half understood him, but he mechanically stretched out his arm to take up a handful of bank-notes.

"You are too late, sir," interposed the count. "I have just dealt the first card."

Carnac paused, bewildered, and Fertugue muttered between his teeth: "The die is cast. All or nothing."

It was all. The bank had lost on either hand; and was broken! The count, very pale, but perfectly composed, emptied his pocket-book, and when all claims upon him were adjusted, he quietly rose and walked leisurely out of the room.

"It is very evident that money is of little or no value to him," remarked Vermandois, maliciously.

The observation struck Carnac very forcibly, and he felt strongly inclined to ask for an explanation, but Fertugue did not give him time. "Pocket your money, my dear fellow," he exclaimed. "A napoleon invested ten times over has yielded one thousand and eighty napoleons. Each of us realizes ten thousand two hundred and forty francs by the investment."

"Ten thousand francs!" exclaimed Carnac. "Impossible!"

"Count your money. You are rich, my dear fellow, and can set up housekeeping whenever you like."

## V.

SUNDAY has come—the great day on which Jean Carnac based all his hopes. He had been dreaming for ten days of the happiness promised him by this visit to the Louvre in company with Mademoiselle Brunier, but he was totally unprepared for the events which had made him the happiest of men. It was no longer necessary for him to deprive himself of everything in order to redeem his frock-coat at the Mont-de-Piété. He was rich now, and he was no longer obliged to work for pork butchers. He had changed the bank-notes won at the *baccarat* table into shining gold, and he never wearied of contemplating his treasure. But, unfortunately, wealth always brings anxiety with it, and Carnac trembled lest his gold would be stolen from him, and knew not where to place it for safe-keeping. No article of furniture in his possession locked securely, and he did not possess either a safe or a casket.

For a moment he thought strongly of concealing the money in his mattress, but this mode of concealment, so much in vogue with stingy old maids and miserly beggars, seemed to him decidedly vulgar and unworthy of an artist. He did not think for an instant of converting the money into bonds: it is even doubtful if he knew that such things existed, still less did he think of depositing it in a banking-house; the most trustworthy financiers inspired him with no confidence whatever. After racking his

brain for some time he finally came to the conclusion that he would have a stout leather belt made, and in this he concealed his treasure, wearing it round his waist under his shirt, where it occasioned him no little discomfort, for ten thousand francs in gold weigh about seven pounds, and Carnac was in the habit of going about very lightly clad.

Pleased as he was with this acquisition of wealth, he had been greatly disappointed in some of the results of his night adventure at the club-house, for when he hastened to Gerfaut to report what had occurred, his master silenced him peremptorily, and told him he would not for an instant allow any one to say, in his presence, anything at all derogatory to the moral character of M. de Charny. Although Carnac stoutly declared that this nobleman was in the habit of spending his nights at the gaming-table, Gerfaut formally refused to listen to these slanders, as he called them, so that the young fellow did not venture to speak of the ring; for it would have been necessary to enter into a series of explanations to which the sculptor would certainly have refused to listen.

Still less did Carnac dare to warn Camille. The count was more assiduous in his attentions to her than ever, and the bearer of any unfavourable information concerning her lover's character was not likely to be kindly received, or patiently heard. The count spent most of his time at the house on the Boulevard des Batignolles, and very often dined there. It not unfrequently happened that he came down to the studio with the father and daughter, and exchanged a casual remark or two with Carnac as coolly as if the secret of his twofold existence had not been known to the sculptor's pupil.

To see the disdainful indifference with which he treated Carnac, one would have imagined that he deemed it utterly impossible that this insignificant youth would venture to criticise the conduct of a nobleman, and that he attached no importance whatever to the risk he ran of being denounced. Moreover, the loss of some thirty or forty thousand francs did not seem to have inconvenienced him in the least, or to have compelled him to change any of his extravagant habits. When he came to call upon his betrothed, a brand-new dog-cart and a well-dressed groom waited for him at the door, and Gerfaut had remarked several times in Carnac's presence that his notary had been in conference with M. de Charny's notary, and that matters had been arranged to the satisfaction of all the parties concerned, that the marriage contract, moreover, had been drawn up and all the other legal formalities complied with.

On hearing this Carnac had come to the conclusion that Fertugue must be mistaken respecting the count's financial position, for it is no easy matter to deceive a notary, since, to satisfy him, he must see and examine the title-deeds of all landed property, or the bonds and securities from which the income is derived. But, worst of all, poor Carnac felt that he was now regarded with distrust both by Gerfaut and Camille. His master's manner towards him was cold in the extreme; and Camille began to dislike him altogether, for she felt sure that he did not approve of her approaching marriage. He had not even had the consolation of seeing Annette Brunier since the evening of Madame Stenay's soirée. However, disappointed in his first attempt to unmask the two unscrupulous plotters, Carnac retreated into his shell, and abandoned himself to blissful dreams of love. What did it matter to him, after all, if Gerfaut was fool enough to allow himself to be duped by these impostors? He, Carnac, had the consciousness of having performed his duty, and he was not in a position to save the father and

daughter against their will. What he must try to do was to please Mademoiselle Brunier, ingratiate himself into Marcel's favour, and induce him to favour his suit. He fancied that the ten thousand francs he had won would assist him materially in this last undertaking. With ten thousand francs, a person is not rich, but he is no longer really poor. Many couples that work for a livelihood, and live happily, have not even this modest capital.

Fertugue, who had not re-visited the club for fear of losing his money, was not aware whether the count had had the audacity to return there or not. Carnac was equally in the dark respecting the movements of Madame de Carouge and Margot with the scar, for he had not set foot either in Barbizon's establishment or in Madame Langoumois' shop of late. Graindorge had given no signs of life. The young sculptor only left home to go to the studio, and returned at an early hour after partaking of a frugal supper at a little restaurant in the Rue de Clignancourt. He had solemnly sworn not to touch his treasure, so he carefully avoided all unnecessary expense. He had even been courageous enough to complete the pork butcher's pig, in order not to lose the twenty francs still due to him.

But the happy day dawned at last, and Carnac, who had risen with the sun, and arrayed himself in his finest apparel, started, just as noon was striking, for the Rue Labat, where the brother and sister were to be ready to accompany him at one o'clock. It was not a ten minutes' walk from his garret in the Rue Ordener to the home of the Bruniers, but a lover's watch is always fast, and although Carnac possessed no timepiece of any kind, he was none the less eager to reach his destination. It was only the first week in February, but the weather was clear and warm. The warm sun rays shone brightly upon the garret casements, and cheered the hearts of the little shop-girls who were hurrying home to dress before joining their lovers at the Moulin de la Galette, or in the Parc des Buttes Chamont. Smiling faces looked out of the windows, white arms were stretched forth to water pots of flowers, and children were playing gaily in the middle of the streets. Such Sundays are blessings indeed to the poor, who are compelled to toil throughout the week, and whose pleasures, from want of money, are confined to a promenade.

Carnac's heart beat faster when he turned into the Rue Labat, and still more quickly when he saw the house in which Annette lived. It had not been built to shelter millionaires, for it was a plain looking, five-storeyed tenement, but it was new and eminently respectable in appearance. Carnac had never visited the Bruniers, but he knew that they occupied the fourth floor, and he glanced up to see if, by any chance, the young girl was at one of the windows. She was not, but on the storey above the face of a man who sat smoking a pipe, with his elbow on the window-sill, attracted Carnac's attention. From the street below Carnac could see little more than a heavy black beard and a cloud of smoke, and yet it seemed to him that this was not the first time he had seen this singular effect of beard and smoke. In order to see the better, he stepped out into the middle of the street, and from this point he became satisfied that his instinct had not deceived him. The man leaning on the window-ledge on the fifth floor was none other than the odious Adrien, the husband of the unfortunate Jeanne Plantin, and the factotum of Margot with the scar. He was evidently at home, or at least in the room of some intimate friend, for he sat in his shirt sleeves and wore a red fez, the tassel of which hung down to within an inch of his hooked nose : in short, the usual undress costume of men of his stamp.

"It is certainly Adrien," said Carnac to himself; "and by the persistency with which he keeps his head turned towards the Boulevard Ornano I fancy that he is expecting some one. What if he should be waiting for Margot? In that case, I should be in luck. But, however that may be, I have him in my power now. Marcel must know him, as he lives just under him. He can probably give me some information about his neighbour's habits and the persons who visit him. If need be, I will pay the scoundrel a visit and question him myself. What surprises me most is that he should have taken up his abode in this house. It is true that he can't know that the Bruniers are acquainted with the man he tried to rob on the night of the ball at the Elysée. But I have looked at him long enough. If I remain here he will be sure to notice me, and his suspicions will be aroused. I have plenty of time, for I shall find him here whenever I want him, and this morning I have something pleasanter on hand than talking to him."

Carnac took advantage of a moment when Adrien was looking in another direction to enter the house. The porter's room was at the end of a neatly kept hall, and Carnac did not venture to go upstairs without asking for M. Brunier. "He has gone out, but his sister is at home," replied the porter's wife, who was so busily engaged in skimming her dinner-pot that she did not even turn to look at the visitor.

Carnac, though a little surprised that Marcel should have failed to keep his engagement, thought the brother's absence ought not to prevent him from presenting himself before the sister at the appointed hour, so he quietly ascended the stairs. On reaching the fourth floor, he saw a door, the brass knob of which shone as brilliantly as if it had been polished by the painstaking hand of a Dutch servant, and as no other portal was visible, he could not be mistaken. Besides, he heard a fresh, ringing voice warbling a gay little ditty; a voice which he instantly recognised as that of Mademoiselle Brunier. So he rang the bell, and Annette herself came to open the door. "What, is it you?" she said, blushing a little. "Then you cannot have received the letter my brother sent you."

"No; I have received no letter," stammered poor Carnac, greatly crestfallen.

"Marcel was obliged to go to the bank again this morning to look over some important accounts, and not knowing when he would be at liberty, he wrote you a note, informing you that our visit to the museum must once more be postponed."

"I am truly unfortunate."

"And I am equally so. I begin to think that I never shall see the Venus of Milo. I had looked forward with so much pleasure to this little outing."

"And so had I. I have thought of nothing else for ten days past, and have made great preparations for it."

"That is true. You have your black frock-coat, I see," said the girl, laughing. "I did not put on my ear-rings, because I knew that we were not going, and you find me in my everyday dress. But I won't be so rude as to send you off after your climb to the fourth floor. Pray come in and rest a moment."

"I should only be too glad to do so if you can assure me that your brother will not be displeased."

"If Marcel returns sooner than I expect, he will be very glad to see you."

Carnac had hesitated only for appearance sake, for he was delighted to have an opportunity of declaring his love, and so he entered without any more urging.

"You see that we are very comfortably lodged here," said Annette. "We have to pay a rent of five hundred francs, which is rather dear, I admit, but our rooms are worth it, after all. Think, we have an ante-chamber, a dining-room, and three other rooms—one for Marcel, one for me, and one for our common use—the one we are in now. We ought to have made a drawing-room of it, but we should have been obliged to furnish it properly, and we are not rich. Besides, as we receive no company, we prefer to use it as a sort of study and work-room. You see the table on which Marcel writes his plays, and over there, by the window, is the table where I mount my flowers. Come now, and get a bird's-eye view of Paris. This is furnished gratuitously, for our landlord has not yet devised a means of making us pay for the air we breathe and the view we can obtain."

The view was, indeed, well worthy of admiration, for as the house on the opposite side of the street was much lower, the hills of Clamart and Châtillon, where the Prussian batteries were stationed during the siege of Paris, were distinctly visible. "Isn't it beautiful?" inquired Annette. "In the evening, when the sun sinks behind Mont Valérien, the slopes are bathed in the loveliest rose colour, and the dome of the Invalides glitters like a huge ball of shining gold."

"From my room I enjoy a different, but an equally charming view," replied the student of nature, gaily. "I live just under the roof, in the Rue Ordener, and from my sixth floor window I command the whole plain of Saint Denis and the woods of Montmorency, which is sufficient proof that we are congenial spirits."

"Now, come and let me show you my flowers, the artificial ones by which I earn my living—I have some natural ones, which you shall help me to water presently. I am almost sure that you know nothing whatever about the manufacture of an artificial rose."

"I confess that I don't."

"Nevertheless, you have seen me at work often enough in Monsieur Gerfaut's studio. You must have taken great pains not to see what I was doing."

"Your eyes distracted my attention."

"Well, here you won't see them, for I never raise them from my work, and I have been very busy ever since sunrise this morning. At ten o'clock I breakfasted on a roll and a cup of coffee, and now I have only to make a single rose to finish a garland which I am to take back to-morrow, and for which I shall receive fifteen francs, nearly half as much as you received for executing a certain statue in fat."

"Thank heaven! I shall never be obliged to do such a thing again; at least, I hope not."

"I echo your wish; but come and see how I imitate the flowers that bloom in the sunlight."

As she spoke, Annette took a bit of fine wire from the table and surrounded it with filaments of yellow silk which she cut of equal length with her scissors. "These are the stamens," she remarked. "Now, watch my movements closely. I dip the stamens into a sort of glue to make them stiff, then dry them over this little spirit lamp. Now that they are dry, I moisten the ends of them in this paste, the principal

ingredient of which is gum-arabic, and then I plunge them into a dish of yellow powder. The heart of my rose is completed."

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Carnac, who had not once taken his eyes off the girl's white, tapering fingers.

"Now I must add the petals. I have them of all sizes and shapes. They are made of very fine cambric, you see. I take them up one by one, give each of them a tiny pinch, rub a little carmine over them with this brush, taking care to colour them more deeply in the centre than round the edges. I next fasten them round the stamens, and then add the calyx—as I am doing now."

"Upon my word of honour! I don't know why people still grow roses in their gardens."

"I should be very sorry if they ceased to do so. Now I am going to add all the leaves. If I had to make them I should never finish, for they not only have to be notched, but it is also necessary to imitate the veins, the brilliancy of the upper side, and the soft velvety appearance underneath. But I have them all ready prepared. So I fasten them to the wire, envelope the stem in a bit of cotton, and twist some pale green tissue paper around it, as you see. That is everything. My rose is finished now, and you are at liberty to admire it as much as you like."

"Only to admire it?" asked Carnac, timidly.

Annette hesitated for an instant, but he seemed so much embarrassed and yet so anxious that she took pity on him, and replied: "And to take it away with you, if you like. It was for you that I made it."

"For me!" exclaimed Carnac. "Will you, indeed, give it to me?"

"Yes, I will present it to you," Annette answered, gaily. "You can put it under a glass case if you are anxious to preserve a memento of me; and it will last much longer than a rose purchased at the flower market."

"It is not under a glass case that I shall place it——"

"Where, then? Oh, yes, I can guess. Upon your heart, is it not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and I assure you——"

"I assure you that it would be perfectly ridiculous. It is all very well to place a natural flower there, or even one that a person has dried and pressed—for that has lived—and when its beauty has departed one may wear it on one's breast like a relic without the slightest impropriety. But this combination of cambric, wax, and green paper——"

"It is enough for me to know that you mounted it."

"Then, if I stitched shoes for a living, you would tie a satin slipper I had manufactured about your neck, I suppose?" said the girl, bursting into a hearty laugh.

"Excuse me, I don't know how to express my feelings very well, and you compel me to say plainly and frankly that—I love you."

"A proposal, upon my word!"

"Yes. You think, perhaps, that I am breaking all the proper rules of a love scene, and that I ought to have prepared the way with some fine words, and finally have fallen on my knees before you."

"In that case I should only have ridiculed you. I detest high-flown talk and theatrical postures. But do you wish me to answer you seriously?"

"I should be infinitely obliged to you if you would."

"Very well, then, I will. It is not yet a month since we became acquainted—since you met me for the first time at Monsieur Gerfaunt's house, a few days after the terrible accident that deprived him of his sight.

If I said that you did not impress me favourably from the very first, I should be telling an untruth."

"And I loved you the very first time I saw you. I lost my heart in an instant."

"Well, though I am only a poor girl I have a heart as well as any heroine of romance, but I am not at all inclined to bestow it upon the first person who happens to pass by."

"Then in your eyes I am only the first person who happens to pass by," repeated Carnac, sadly.

"Again you exaggerate. If I only looked on you in that light, I should certainly not be entertaining you here in my brother's absence; or if I did, I should beg you to leave as soon as you spoke a word of love. But to return to the beginning of our acquaintance, I immediately made some inquiries about you—sufficient proof, it seems to me, that you were not altogether indifferent to me."

"Then you asked Monsieur Gerfaut about me?" inquired Carnac, eagerly.

"Yes, and his daughter, too. Did I do wrong?"

"That depends entirely upon what they told you."

"They spoke very well of you, though Monsieur Gerfaut complained that you were more fond of a Bohemian life than of work, and Made-moiselle Gerfaut expressed regret that you were not more careful about your dress. It may be that she has never seen you in a black frock-coat," added the girl, mischievously.

"She has seen me in a dress-coat and white cravat, but even then she only had eyes for Monsieur de Charny; and I admit that I can't hope to rival that gentleman in elegance. I should even be sorry to resemble him in any way."

"And you are right. But where did Camille see you in such festive attire?"

"At Madame Stenay's soirée, last Wednesday evening. Gerfaut insisted upon my accompanying them there, but I had not the pleasure of seeing you."

"Oh, I have no evening dress. But if we wander from our subject in this way, we shall never finish. As I said before, both Monsieur Gerfaut and his daughter spoke very well of you. They declared that you were intelligent and kind-hearted—two virtues that outweigh all others in my eyes. They assured me, too, that you were quite capable of attaining a very enviable position in the artistic world, and of making money. Camille even declared that all you needed was to fall deeply in love with some sensible young girl who would give you some of her own steadiness of purpose and good sense."

"Then I must be perfect now, or very nearly so," Carnac interrupted, quickly.

"So you wish to marry me? You are really in earnest about it?" asked Annette, archly.

"Can you doubt it?"

"Not exactly. But before answering you, there are several questions I should like to ask, and some objections to be presented for your consideration. You are poor, and I am as poor as you are. Have you reflected on the cost of maintaining even the most modest household. My brother earns two hundred and fifty francs a month; by working hard I can earn about one hundred and fifty more, and yet we have no little

difficulty in making both ends meet, though we practise the utmost economy. How would it be if I married you? We should, neither of us, I am sure of it, be willing to live upon my brother. We should want to begin housekeeping, of course, and where should we obtain the money to defray the necessary expenses? My father left me nothing, and I have not been able to put by any of my earnings. I am not afraid of poverty; I have borne it uncomplainingly, and I could continue to do so; but I could not bear the thought that a day might come when my husband might repent of having condemned himself to a life of toil and privation by uniting his life with mine. I am too proud to consent to be entirely dependent upon him, and I should be equally unwilling for him to be dependent upon me."

"Should we not be on an equal footing? I receive a hundred francs a month from Gerfaut, and I can easily increase this amount by working after hours."

"For pork butchers?" asked Annette, with a smile.

"You are cruel, mademoiselle," replied Carnac, laughing in his turn.

"No, I shall never lower myself again by modelling animals in fat. I shall remain a sculptor, and shall model busts and statuettes which will sell very well, I assure you. You think I have no talent, perhaps?"

"No; on the contrary, Monsieur Gerfaut assures me that you have a great deal of talent, and I so thoroughly agree with him that if you were my husband I should never rest until you became famous. I should look forward to seeing you a member of the Institute, with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour in the button-hole of that celebrated black frock-coat."

"I would give all the decorations in the world to be sure that you would return a little of the love I bear you. Consent to marry me, and I shall care no more whether I belong to the Institute or not than I care of having had no ancestors among the Crusaders."

"Oh, you are a thousand times better than Monsieur de Charny; but ambition is one of the most important requisites in an artist, and you would make a very great mistake in not aiming high. Fame is greatly preferable to money, although we can't do without money, unfortunately."

"Ah, well, fame will come, perhaps; for though I care very little about it myself, I feel quite capable of winning a name for the sake of pleasing you; but, in the meantime, I may as well confess that I have some money on hand."

"Really? I did not suspect it, nor did Monsieur Gerfaut, I'm sure. Why did you conceal the fact from him?"

"Oh, I haven't much, nor have I had it very long. I have told no one but you, mademoiselle; and my only reason for alluding to it now is to answer the objection you have just made. The amount I possess is not large by any means, but it will serve to defray the expenses that cause you so much uneasiness; in short, I have ten thousand francs."

"Why, that is a fortune. Have you come into a legacy, then?"

"No, I have no relative except a cousin, an old maid, who isn't worth a penny."

"Then where did you obtain this money? You didn't find it in the street, I hope?"

"As I found the ring in the passage at the Mont-de-Piété! No, mademoiselle. I kept the ring for reasons that I explained to you, but if I found a million francs I should hasten to the nearest commissary of police and entrust them to his care, nor would I accept any reward even if it were pressed upon me."

"But you certainly did not make ten thousand francs yourself!"

"Excuse me, but I did."

"By your own labour? That is truly wonderful! All the pork butchers in Paris must have pledged themselves to employ you."

"Make as much fun of me as you like, I deserve it, for I made this money last Wednesday—at the card-table."

"At the card-table!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Brunier. "You are a gambler, and yet you expect me to marry you?"

"I assure you that I never touched a card in my life."

"Until last Wednesday," said Annette, ironically. "But it is the first step that tells, and you will undoubtedly try again. Gambling is a most disgraceful habit, and I am surprised that you should boast of the possession of such ill-gotten gains. I am still more surprised that you should dare to ask me to share them with you."

"Mademoiselle, I implore you not to condemn me without a hearing. If you only knew how it happened——"

"I don't wish to know."

"One of my friends—an artist—happened to be at Madame Stenay's reception, and after we left there he took me to a club to show me the Count de Charny in his true colours—that is, as a confirmed gambler of the most reckless kind."

Carnac suddenly paused in the midst of his explanation, for Mademoiselle Brunier motioned him to be silent. "It is my brother," she said, after listening for a moment.

"Your brother! what will he say at finding me here?"

"He will understand that you failed to receive the note he sent you, and he will be greatly pleased to see you," replied Annette, quietly.

The door opened and Marcel Brunier entered. He looked gloomy and pre-occupied, and in spite of his sister's assertions he seemed by no means delighted on perceiving Jean Carnac, who was greatly at a loss as to what it was best for him to do or say. "I am sorry that you have given yourself so much trouble for nothing," began Marcel. "I sent you word that I should be detained at the bank the greater part of the day. I got away sooner than I expected; but I was obliged to bring a pile of accounts home with me to be looked over. The work is important, and it will be impossible for me to accompany my sister to the museum, so we shall be obliged to postpone our visit again."

"I have already explained all that to Monsieur Carnac," said Annette.

"He has been here about twenty minutes, and we have had time to discuss a number of topics. He has just told me, indeed, that he loves me, and has asked for my hand in marriage."

"What do you mean by that jesting?" asked Marcel, with a frown.

"I, for one, am deeply in earnest," interposed Carnac, eagerly. "It is to you, of course, that I ought to have applied at first, and I did wrong not to wait for your return before expressing my sentiments, but——"

"Explain, if you please, instead of apologising. What can have put this strange idea of marrying my sister into your head? You scarcely know her."

"I have known her as long as you have known Mademoiselle Gerfaut," replied the student of nature very appositely, "and from the very first she made a deep impression upon me."

"Monsieur Carnac calls it a case of love at first sight," murmured the girl, smilingly

"May I ask what reply you gave to Monsieur Carnac?"

"I told him there were several very serious objections to the match. But, first of all, I must tell you something that happened a short time ago. When I went to the Mont-de-Piété in the Rue Fromentin to redeem my ear-rings, while you were waiting for me on the boulevard, I met Monsieur Carnac, who came to redeem the coat he is wearing at this very moment. We entered into conversation, of course, and we are no longer the strangers you suppose us to be."

"Perhaps not; but between this chance meeting and an offer of marriage——"

"There is a wide gulf, I know," interrupted Carnac, "but I beg that you will listen to me, and not be offended at what I am going to tell you. I discovered some time ago that you loved Mademoiselle Camille, and I was overwhelmed with consternation when I learned that she was about to marry the Count de Charny, whom I detest as heartily as he detests you. I immediately espoused your cause, and solemnly vowed to do everything I could to break off the match. The count is an utter scamp. I have proofs of it now, and it was while I was obtaining the first evidence against him that I was fortunate enough to have the conversation with your sister which decided my fate. I said to myself that if I succeeded in ridding you of an unworthy rival, you would perhaps forgive me for having ventured to aspire to the honour of becoming your brother-in-law."

"Is this a bargain you are proposing to me?" inquired Marcel, drily.

"No, my dear," interposed Annette, "for Monsieur Carnac knows perfectly well that this bargain cannot be concluded without my consent, and he began by consulting me. I am not altogether inclined to say yes, but I am strongly inclined to enter into a league composed of us three—a league the object of which would be to save my dear Camille and expose the plans of the unscrupulous man with whom she is so deeply infatuated. Monsieur de Charny is our common enemy; let us combine against him."

"You have a very peculiar way of stating the case."

"It is a very correct one, all the same. I am frank, and I like to state the facts plainly. Monsieur Carnac has just asked me to marry him. I am not offended by his boldness, although I am as yet unable to give him a decided answer. At present we will only be his allies in the task he has undertaken; but when my poor friend's fate is decided—— Ah, well, then, we will see."

"If the task to which you allude is the prevention of a marriage which is to take place this very week, the undertaking is certainly absurd."

"No; it is difficult, but not impossible. It is only necessary to open the eyes of Camille, to show her this man in his true character, and to enlighten Monsieur Gerfaut respecting the life and conduct of his intended son-in-law. Now, Monsieur Carnac declares that he is in a position to do all this."

"Something more than a mere assertion is necessary in such a case," said Marcel, turning to the young sculptor.

"I am ready to tell you everything I know," replied Jean, eagerly. "And you shall decide what course it is best to pursue after hearing my story."

"Speak; I am listening," said Marcel, with undiminished coolness, though Carnac's promised revelations interested him deeply.

"My suspicions date from the day on which Monsieur de Charny paid a visit to the studio while you were there."

"I have good reason for remembering that day," said Marcel, bitterly. "Mademoiselle Gerfaut, who probably deemed it necessary to crush my last hopes, compelled me to witness her betrothal, and listen to their plans for a long journey——"

"Yes; the trip to the East. Gerfaut often speaks of it, but I have no faith in the existence of the Smyrna uncle myself. I believe the count invented this touching tale of a dying relative solely for the purpose of inducing my employer to hasten the marriage. He was afraid that some of his secrets might be discovered, so he did not want the affair to drag along."

"I confess that the same thought has occurred to me, but——"

"But you did not notice that, although he pretended not to know the singer who was brought to the studio by Madame Stenay, he nevertheless exchanged a meaning look with her."

"No. My sister fancied she noticed the same thing, but I perceived nothing to arouse my suspicions."

"Nevertheless, I am now almost certain that I was not mistaken," replied Annette.

"All this amounts to little or nothing, however," resumed Carnac, "for the count might have his reasons for concealing his acquaintance with the *prima donna*. It would not be at all strange for a man to do such a thing, when he unexpectedly found himself in the presence of an old flame in the house of the young lady he hopes to marry. It would not be a capital offence by any means, but in this case——"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Brunier, "you evidently have fine principles. Under the same circumstances, you would act in the same way before me, then?"

"It is not a supposable case, mademoiselle, for, as I told you, I have no old flames. I told you, too, I think, that the policeman who happened to be present at the time was struck by the extraordinary resemblance between Madame de Carouge and a rather disreputable woman who was formerly well known round about Montmartre."

"You told me that this woman used to be called Margot with the scar, did you not?"

"Precisely. And so it seemed very strange that the count should know her, and when we saw Madame de Carouge leaving the Mont-de-Piété an hour afterwards it seemed stranger still. Then came the affair of the ring."

Marcel knew nothing about this, so his sister undertook to enlighten him. When she had finished speaking, Carnac resumed, "I am now sure that this ring does belong to M. de Charny, for I succeeded in reading the device with the aid of a strong magnifying glass, and it is his family motto."

"How do you know that?"

"Some one repeated it to him in my presence, and he did not deny it. Last Wednesday, on leaving Madame Stenay's soirée, where Madame de Carouge sang a duet, or rather several duets, with Monsieur de Charny, Fertugue, a painter of my acquaintance, took me to a gambling den dignified by the name of club-house——"

"Where you won ten thousand francs," added Annette, mischievously.

"That is true, although I blush to admit it; but I had the pleasure of seeing the count lose some thirty or forty thousand, and I also learned that this noble personage is a confirmed gambler, who had not scorned to follow

some of the most disreputable callings, but who has become suddenly wealthy without any one being able to discover the origin of his fortune."

"In that case," exclaimed Marcel, "it will probably only be necessary to tell Monsieur Gerfaut what you have seen to satisfy him as to the real character of his intended son-in-law."

"But unfortunately it is not. I have tried to tell him, but he would not listen to me, and ever since this attempt he has treated me very coldly. He evidently considers me to be a slanderer. Something more will be needed to convince him of the truth of my words. It will be necessary for me to prove to him beyond a doubt that the count is the intimate friend of Madame de Carouge, who volunteered to redeem the jewels he had pawned, and that Madame de Carouge and Margot with the scar are one and the same person."

"That is something you will not succeed in accomplishing," remarked Annette.

"I am by no means sure of it," replied Carnac modestly; "but I have made the most of my time since our meeting at the Mont-de-Piété. That same evening I went to the ball at the Elysée Montmartre."

"I thought you led a very quiet life," observed Annette, ironically.

"The end sanctifies the means, mademoiselle. I knew that Margot had been wont to frequent that place of amusement in former years, and I hoped to meet her there. I did meet her there, in fact——"

"Then you must be satisfied. Was it Madame de Carouge?"

"I believe so, though I cannot swear to it. She was masked. I even went so far as to dance with her."

"Were you all in costume?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. I was dressed as a Red Indian, and I venture to say that not one of my acquaintances would have recognised me!"

"How I should have enjoyed seeing you!"

"I should have died of shame. But the sacrifice of my dignity was not unrewarded. I ascertained, beyond any possible doubt, that the masked lady I met at the ball was the same who had lost the Count de Charny's ring in the Rue Fromentin, for upon seeing this ring on my finger, where I had placed it for the express purpose of attracting her attention, she begged me to give it to her, and when I refused she offered to pay me a very handsome amount for it, saying it had taken her fancy. Failing to obtain possession of it in this manner, she set some scoundrels who were with her upon me. They tried to crush me against the wall and take the ring from me, but as I managed to escape from their clutches they waited for me outside with the intention of robbing me. I succeeded in evading them, however; but it will surprise you to hear that the leader of the gang was one of your neighbours."

"What! one of our neighbours?" repeated Marcel.

"Quite so. He lives on the fifth floor of this house directly over you."

"Who told you so?"

"No one. But I just saw him smoking his pipe at the window. He is a fellow with a long black beard, a hang-dog face, and a nose like the beak of a vulture. I have been searching for him for a week or more, and now that I have found him I intend to question him without delay."

## VI.

THE brother and sister exchanged a look of astonishment. Carnac's story seemed to both of them so like a romance that they only half believed it. "It seems to me that I do remember having met a man answering to your description on the staircase yesterday," said Annette; "but I don't think he has long lived in the house, for I never saw him before."

"We might question the house porter," added Marcel. "Do you know the man's name?"

"His Christian name is Adrien," replied Carnac, "and I have good reason to believe that his surname is Plantin, for that is how his wife calls herself."

"Do you know her?" asked Annette.

"Yes," said the young sculptor, "and you know her as well, mademoiselle. It is the poor woman we saw at the Mont-de-Piété, in the Rue Fromentin." And thereupon he related the scene he had witnessed between the woman and her husband on the night of the masked ball. "I have been searching for the man in vain ever since," he added, "so judge of my delight when, on glancing up to see if you were looking out, I saw him leaning on the sill of one of the windows in the floor above."

"But this man doesn't seem to be acquainted with Monsieur de Charny?"

"But he perhaps knows Madame de Carouge. At all events he knows who the masked woman at the ball was. I shall compel him to tell me her name, and why she was so anxious to obtain possession of my ring."

"And do you fancy he will consent to tell you?"

"There must be some means of loosening his tongue. In the first place, he certainly has some great crime upon his conscience: at least, such is the opinion of Graindorge, who saw his behaviour at the ball; and by threatening him with arrest we can probably induce him to tell what he knows. If not, he is evidently a man who can be easily bought, and I have the funds for the purpose," added Carnac, slapping the belt he wore under his clothes.

"The ten thousand francs!" exclaimed Annette. "Fie! sir, you ought to blush to allude to that discreditable affair."

"I am blushing, mademoiselle," replied Carnac, gaily; "but as I won the money from Monsieur de Charny, and propose spending at least a portion of it in preventing him from marrying Mademoiselle Gerfaut, you must admit that it is not such a bad thing after all."

"Perhaps not; but I hope you are not going to venture into this man's room. He might resort to violence."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him. He knows that I am not to be tampered with. Besides, I don't want to miss the opportunity. He might take it into his head to change his residence."

"There will be two of us against one, in any case," remarked Marcel, "and I agree with Monsieur Carnac that this scoundrel must be questioned, and the sooner the better."

"What! you intend to go upstairs and leave me alone here?"

"Are you such a coward? I thought you were afraid of nothing."

"I tremble for you. This rascal must be armed, and you are not. I fear that he will shoot you. But hark ! it seems to me that I hear some footsteps on the stairs."

On entering the apartment, Marcel had forgotten to close the outer door properly, and as it had remained ajar, the sound of several persons ascending the staircase was distinctly audible. "How stupid of me," remarked Marcel, "not to have shut the door. Wait a minute; I will do so——"

"Don't trouble," exclaimed Carnac, who had already risen and was going towards the ante-room.

However, M. Brunier followed him, and they reached the door leading out upon the landing at the same time. The sound of the footsteps had perhaps aroused Carnac's curiosity for he remembered that Adrien had been sitting at the window apparently watching for some one. At all events, the young sculptor peeped out. The persons he had heard were already ascending the stairs leading to the floor above; but on the landing he perceived a policeman whom he instantly recognised. "What ! is it you, Graindorge ?" he exclaimed. "How fortunate ! Step in here a moment. I want to speak to you."

"Impossible; I'm on duty," replied Graindorge. "I am going down to mount guard in the street below with Colache, while the commissary of police makes an arrest."

"Two words only. Pray come in. We will merely detain you a moment, and if we remain here your superior officer will overhear what I have to say to you."

"I will come in on conditions that you don't keep me more than five minutes. It will take the commissary longer than that to arrest that scoundrel upstairs, for he is in no haste about opening the door. Just hear them ring the bell ! If the commissary finds me at my post on the pavement when he comes down, that will answer every purpose."

So saying Graindorge slipped into the antechamber, and Marcel stood guard at the door. "You are looking for the man we saw at Barbizon's, are you not ?" inquired Carnac.

"No, we have come to arrest the fellow who committed the murder in the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts—the man who asked Monsieur Gerfaut to assist him in carrying the litter."

"Impossible !"

"I am telling you the truth. An anonymous letter, giving a description of the assassin and his address, has been received at the Prefecture. His name is Plantin, and he has a long black beard and a big hooked nose. He moved here only about a week ago, and he doesn't suspect that we are on his track."

"Why, I know the man, and so do you. It was the fellow we met at Barbizon's on the evening of the ball. He was in fancy costume, you remember, and Barbizon told us that he had formerly been a member of Margot's band. It was he who tried to crush me in the ball-room."

"How do you know that ?"

"Before I entered the house, I saw him sitting at a window on the fifth floor."

"But you don't live here, Monsieur Carnac ? You told me that you resided in the Rue Ordener."

"And so I do. I came here to see one of my friends, Monsieur Brunier, who is also a friend of Monsieur Gerfaut's."

"Then you must feel pleased at the arrest of this scoundrel."

"I should be even better pleased if you could find the woman. I have an idea that his accomplice was Margot with the scar."

"Very possibly. And if such is really the case, she will soon be in custody, for Plantin will be sure to inform on her when he is once in prison."

"He doesn't open the door, however. The bell is still ringing, and louder than ever."

"It won't be of the slightest use for him to play dead. He's caught. The commissary will send for a locksmith, and have the door opened. If he should come down and not find me at my post, I should get a reprimand, so excuse me, I must go." As he spoke, Graindorge stole softly out of the room and glided down the stairs into the street.

"What is to be done?" inquired Marcel.

"Close the door and wait for events to direct us," replied Carnac.

Marcel was of the same opinion, so they returned to the room where they had left Mademoiselle Brunier. "Well?" she asked, on seeing them enter.

"We were not deceived," replied Marcel. "The police have come to arrest our neighbour, and it seems that he is the man who murdered the poor woman that Monsieur Gerfaut helped to carry about in a litter."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Annette. "But in that case they will soon discover his accomplice."

"I hope so, indeed, mademoiselle; and as his accomplice must be the woman I met at the Elysée Montmartre, it only remains to be seen if this woman is not at the same time both Margot with the scar and Madame de Carouge. We are not so far from the goal as your brother thought."

"Heaven grant that the wretch won't succeed in making his escape!"

"How could he escape? No doubt he has refused to open his door; for the commissary is going down stairs again. I can hear him with his men; but he will soon return, and all points of egress are guarded. There are policemen either on the pavement or in the hall below."

Just then a heavy thud, followed almost instantly by the crash of broken glass, made them all start. They involuntarily glanced at the window, and to their intense surprise, they saw a man lying on the little balcony. The latter was little more than a very broad window ledge, protected on the outer side by a balustrade; but Annette had found room upon it for a large box, in which she reared sweet peas and morning-glories during the spring and summer. The man had fallen as an aerolite falls to the earth, and the shock had been a severe one, for the upper part of his body had struck against the window, shattering the glass into a thousand pieces, and he lay there as if dead; but his face was visible, and on seeing it, Carnac exclaimed: "It is he! Adrien! Ah, the scoundrel, he escaped the police, and came very near escaping us. He might have dashed his brains out on the pavement below, and then his secret would have perished with him. We should never have known whether it was really Margot, while now——"

"We will hand him over to the police," interrupted Marcel. "Step into your own room, my dear Annette. I don't want you to be brought in contact with this wretch."

"I am going. The mere sight of him terrifies me," faltered Mademoiselle Brunier; "but pray be prudent."

Marcel gently pushed her into an adjoining room and closed the door; then returning to Carnac, he said: "Help me to capture him. We must

bind him and take him to the commissary, who has not yet had time to go very far."

"In any case, Graindorge is on guard below," replied the young sculptor. "But if you take my advice, you won't deliver him up until we have questioned him."

"Let us begin by capturing him," said Marcel, hastening to the window and flinging it open.

The man had only partially regained consciousness, so he allowed himself to be seized and dragged into the room without offering much resistance. "I am caught," he muttered, as Carnac and Brunier placed him on his feet. "I hoped there was no one here."

"And so you tried dropping down upon the balcony from the floor above. Not a bad idea that! You were lucky not to miss the balcony, however. It is better to sleep in prison than in the cemetery; eh, Adrien?"

The scoundrel had not yet seen the faces of his captors; but on hearing his name, he turned, and, glancing at Carnac, recognised him at once. "This is the last straw," he muttered, savagely.

"Ah, ha!" sneered Carnac; "you remember that we have a little account to settle, I see."

"Why? Because I happened to jostle you a little! That was no crime. Besides, I didn't hurt you. You and your friend look like good fellows, so let me go. I will do as much for you some day."

"Even if we released you, you wouldn't go far. The police are below ready to grab you."

"Only let me go, and I will look out for myself, never fear."

"What kind of men do you take us for, you villain?" cried Marcel, indignant at such a display of impudence.

"I know that you are not detectives, and that you won't deliver me up to the police for the sake of a reward. You think me a thief, perhaps. But I'm not one. I never stole anything in my life. I'm only charged with some political offence."

"None of your lies!" said Carnac, sternly. "You won't succeed in imposing upon me. Your head is in danger, and you know it. I understand your case, you see."

"You know nothing at all about it."

"Shall I tell you the contents of the warrant issued for your arrest?"

"You have seen it, then?"

"No, but I know how it reads, as well as if I had seen it. It is a warrant for the arrest of a certain Adrien Plantin, charged with murder."

"It is false! I have killed no one."

"Perhaps you only assisted in the commission of the crime, but your participation will cost you dear. You were the bearer of the famous litter."

"The litter!" exclaimed the man, changing countenance.

"Yes, the litter on which you placed the unfortunate woman who was hanged in the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts. Ah, the murder was well planned. If you did it yourself, you have plenty of ingenuity. But you made one very great mistake. You shouldn't have gone to Barbizon's, for he will be summoned as a witness, and he will recollect that on that very night, at about two o'clock, just as he was shutting up, you came in, breathless and almost exhausted—the same night that Marie Bracieux was killed. I understand it all. After leaving the litter, you ran like a

crazy man until you could go no further, and you were dying of thirst. Nevertheless, you would have done far better had you gone home straight to bed."

Adrien stood the picture of consternation and bewilderment as he listened to this ironical speech. "Barbizon!" he muttered, "then it was he who rounded on me. The old sneak! I might have expected it."

"You are beginning to confess, I see."

"I confess nothing."

"You make a great mistake. You will have to do it sooner or later; it is the only way to save your head. When the magistrate questions you, I should begin by telling him the name of the woman who planned the hanging."

"How can I tell him that?"

"Shall I help you a little? Let me see; was it Margot?"

"What do you mean? I am acquainted with no Margot."

"You told me so once before at Barbizon's, if you recollect. I may have been fool enough to believe you then, but as I have seen you dancing with her since, I know that you are lying."

"Even if I have danced with a woman named Margot, is that any criminal offence, I should like to know?"

"Of course not; but the investigating magistrate may wish to know if it was not the same woman who helped in hanging Marie Bracieux."

"I can't tell him, as I know no more about the affair than he does."

"Let us put an end to this," said Marcel, who did not very clearly understand why Carnac asked these questions, instead of summoning the police and delivering up their prisoner. "Can you take care of this man while I go for the officers?" he added, turning to Carnac.

"You certainly won't do that," pleaded the prisoner. "I took refuge here, because I thought you would take my part against those spies."

Marcel shrugged his shoulders, and started for the door, but Carnac stopped him with a gesture, and said: "Wait a minute and I will go with you. Two of us are none too many to prevent this villain from making his escape, but there is yet another question I wish to ask him."

"So you mean to send me to prison," cried Plantin, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage. "I shall go, then, but you shall learn nothing."

"Would you tell me everything if I promised to release you?"

"Perhaps so."

Carnac was unwilling to bind himself by any promise, but he was equally unwilling to miss any chance of obtaining the information he so earnestly desired. "Listen," he said, after pretending to hesitate, "we have no desire to keep you a prisoner here, nor are we any more anxious to take you to the station-house ourselves. If you will tell us the truth concerning the affair in the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts, we will let you go, and you can get out of the scrape as best you can, though I don't think you have much chance of escaping the officers, who are on guard in the street below."

As he said this, Carnac gave Marcel Brunier a meaning glance, and emphasised the last sentence strongly, as if to make him understand that the promise was not incompatible with the self-respect of an honourable man, for the house was so closely guarded that escape was impossible. Marcel remained silent, and Adrien thought, perhaps, that these gentlemen were mistaken in regard to his chances of escape, for his eyes brightened, and he answered hastily: "It's a bargain, if you agree to let

me leave this room as soon as I have told you all I know about the affair. But make haste, for the commissary may return at any moment. My story isn't long. It can all be summed up in a few words: Yes, I know a woman named Margot, who has a scar on her face."

"Is she the woman I met at the ball?"

"The same. I hadn't seen her for several years when I met her one day about a fortnight ago on the Place Pigalle. She said to me: 'If you will lend me a helping hand this evening, you shall have a hundred francs.' I was pleased by the offer, of course, and asked her what I was to do. She replied that she had recently rented a house, and that a woman had just committed suicide, by hanging herself there. She said she was afraid of being put to some annoyance on account of it, and that she had succeeded in devising a means of getting rid of the body, but that she needed some one's assistance. You know how she proposed to do it. There was to be a litter and a fool to help me to carry it. I told her that she would be caught—that the man would find out the trick after I left him, and return to the house. 'Well, let him come,' she said. 'I shall be waiting for him in the alley, and I will throw some vitriol in his face. I have purchased some for the express purpose.'"

"Vitriol!" exclaimed Carnac. "Then it was she who——" He paused just in time not to disclose Gerfaut's name.

"Yes," answered Adrien. "It seems that she used it, for I heard that a gentleman had been blinded——"

"I knew the gentleman," said Carnac. "It was the same man who assisted you in carrying the litter."

"I suspected as much, though I wasn't sure. Well, this is exactly what happened. Margot had told me to meet her at midnight at the end of the Rue de l'Elysée. I was there a quarter of an hour ahead of time, for I didn't mean to miss my hundred francs. She was waiting for me on the door-step, and began by advancing me five napoleons. I pocketed the money and entered the alley, where she showed me a covered litter like those used in carrying sick people to hospitals. 'The woman is there, hidden under the covers,' she said. 'You have only to wait in the street until you see some intoxicated man come along. There are always lots of them in this neighbourhood, and especially on Saturday nights. But he mustn't be too drunk, for if he staggers too much he will be sure to drop his burden on the way; still he must be drunk enough not to remember the streets through which you take him.'"

"Did you find a man of the kind?"

"Not immediately. It was late, and none passed by. At last, a little before two o'clock in the morning, I saw a man come reeling up the street. On reaching the end of the alley at the foot of the steps leading to the mayor's office he ran against the wall, and then stood there for a minute or two, stunned by the shock. I approached him and told him that my wife was dangerously ill, and that there was no one to help me to take her to the hospital. He fell into the trap, and consented to help me. Margot was at the end of the alley watching the operation, but he had no idea that she was there."

"No, unfortunately," muttered Carnac.

"So we picked up the litter, and started off, I leading the way. It was necessary to avoid the police, and to prevent my companion from recognising the streets through which we passed. This was no easy matter, as I did not dare to venture on to the boulevard, for there are so many people

about at closing time. Well, I took him up and down the side streets and alleys, and finally brought him back to the place we started from without his noticing it. Finally, when I heard some policemen coming I decamped under pretext of going to call them to our assistance. I escaped the officers, but I was fool enough to drop into Barbizon's to get a drink. That ruined me. I left the gentleman standing guard over the litter, and I don't know exactly what happened to him afterwards.

"I'll tell you. The policemen took him to the station-house, where they found that the woman was dead, and that she had a piece of rope about her neck. He was asked to explain, and he related his adventure, but they would not believe him. Then he offered to go and show them the house."

"That is exactly what I feared," said Adrien, with an air of pretended commiseration.

"And he found it. He approached it while the police were still round the corner, and it was at that moment——"

"That Margot, the wretch! threw the vitriol in his eyes," interrupted Adrien.

"And her aim was sure. He is blind for life."

"If I had been there I should have prevented her from doing such a cruel thing."

"But you were not there. You were refreshing yourself at Barbizon's."

"I was thirsty, you know. But what Margot did seems even worse from the fact that it wasn't at all necessary, for as my friend hadn't seen her he couldn't possibly have informed on her."

"If he has not informed on her, I will."

"And you will do perfectly right. Yes; if she is sent to the penitentiary, she will get only what she deserves; but though I am as innocent as a newborn child I shall have no end of trouble with the police. It won't be of the slightest use for me to tell them that I didn't know the woman who was hanged, and that I merely took charge of her body to earn a hundred francs. No one will believe me, and I shall be the one to suffer. That isn't fair. And when I am at Mazas, Margot won't send me a penny."

"You can write to your wife. She won't desert you."

"My wife! Oh, you were there the other night when she made a fool of herself at Barbizon's. Perhaps it was she who rounded on me. If I was sure of it, I'd cut her throat precious quick, I can tell you. But that isn't the question just now. I have told you all you want to know. The police will soon be back with a locksmith to open my door. They won't find me in my room, but they will know that I can't be far off, and they will search your rooms, too. It won't be very pleasant for you, if they find me here, so keep your promise and let me go."

"As soon as you have answered a few more questions."

"More questions! If you make me lose five more minutes I shan't be able to make my escape."

"It won't take you five minutes to tell me who Margot really is."

"Margot is Margot, that is all I know about her. I have only seen her at balls, except once when I met her on the Place Pigalle, as I told you."

"You can't make me believe that you don't know her real name and address. You are in her employ. At the Elysée Montmartre she bade you get my ring away from me at any cost. You didn't succeed, but you left no means untried, and you have certainly been to claim your reward."

"You arrange everything to suit yourself, but I tell you again that Margot spends her time in gadding about, and that if you want to see

her, you need only frequent public balls and drinking shops. You will be sure to meet her there."

"I should be even more certain of not missing her if I went to the Rue d'Anjou and asked for her."

"Then go," replied Adrien, who seemed in no wise disconcerted, "but don't keep me any longer. You solemnly promised me that you wouldn't detain me if I told you the truth. I have done so; and even if you cut me in pieces I could not tell you any more."

"But at least you know how long it is since Margot returned to Paris. I hadn't seen her for six or seven years."

"Nor had I. I think she returned at the beginning of the carnival. But again I beg of you to let me go."

"Where was she all this time?"

"Rusticating, probably. Is that all you want to know?"

"Not quite. When you knew her in former years, did you often see a Monsieur de Charny with her—the Count de Charny, I believe?"

"Very possibly. She had a great many acquaintances, and knew several counts and marquises, but she never introduced them to me."

"This man's first name was Philippe."

"There may have been a Philippe, as well as Alfreds and Ernests among her acquaintances."

Once again Carnac had made a mistake. Adrien was evidently telling the truth when he said that he had never been introduced to M. de Charny, even if that noble had been, or still was, Margot's lover. But the moment had come for the young sculptor to unmask his last battery. "Do you know Madame de Carouge?" he asked, point-blank.

"Madame de Carouge!" repeated the man, in a less assured tone.

"Yes; Marguerite de Carouge, a singer who returned to France from a foreign land about the same time as Margot did, and who so closely resembles her that one would almost swear they were one and the same person."

"No, I—— Hark! I believe they are coming now. Let me go; I have barely time."

"Answer me first."

"Why should I? If I'm caught, it will be your fault, and then, even if I have any secrets I shall keep them to myself, for I shall have no reason to feel grateful to you."

Carnac understood this, and hastening to the door that opened upon the landing, he set it ajar and looked out. He heard some voices below, and leaning over the bannister, he saw Graindorge talking with the commissary in the hall; but they did not seem to be preparing to come up. The locksmith whom they were waiting for had probably not yet arrived. So Carnac still had time to extort a further confession from the scoundrel, and he hurried back to him. "You are mistaken," said he, "the coast is still clear, but it will not be so much longer. You haven't a second to lose."

"Promise me that if I confess you will let me go immediately."

"I have promised. The door is open, you have only to go."

"Well, yes, then, Margot has assumed the name you speak of, and it is under that name that she lives in the Rue d'Anjou. Are you satisfied now?"

"I only want some proof of the truth of your words."

"Proofs! Where can you expect me to obtain them?"

"Wherever you like, but I must have them. Margot must have written

to you. Feel in your pockets; only make haste, for this time I am almost certain that they have started upstairs."

Adrien was foaming with rage, but he finally decided to fumble about in his trousers pockets, where he eventually found a folded paper which he handed to Carnac. The letter was not long, and it took Gerfaut's pupil merely an instant to glance over it. "This will do; you can go now," he remarked. "If you are caught down below, so much the worse for you."

The rascal did not wait to be told a second time. He crossed the ante-chamber with two bounds, and sprang out upon the landing.

"He will run straight into the arms of Graindorge," murmured Carnac. But an instant afterwards he added: "Why, no; instead of going downstairs he is returning to the floor above. How the devil does he expect to make his escape from there? If he goes back to his own room, he will certainly be captured. I hear the footsteps of the police. The commissary must be returning with his men and the locksmith. They will certainly open the door of the apartment above, and unless Master Adrien leaps out of the window a second time, they will have him before many minutes are over."

"If he lets himself down upon the balcony again I shall hand him over to his pursuers. We did wrong to let him go, I think," remarked Marcel.

"Nonsense! we have Madame de Carouge in our power now. I have a letter here which places her completely at our mercy. But how strange it is that Adrien didn't go back to his room! If he had done so, we should have heard him unlock the door. What the deuce has become of him?"

"Perhaps he is trying to make his escape by the roof," suggested Marcel.

"You are right," exclaimed Carnac; "there must be a skylight or a trap-door up there. I don't know how I failed to think of it. But it makes no difference, after all, for even if the rascal succeeded in making his escape to-day, he will certainly be caught sooner or later. Between ourselves, I should much prefer if he wasn't arrested here: we should be obliged to enter into an explanation, and——"

"Heaven grant that we may not be charged with helping him to escape!" muttered Marcel.

"There is no danger of that. Graindorge, the policeman who saw us a few minutes ago, will testify, if necessary, that I had good cause to complain of this rascal, and that I was not at all likely to take him under my protection."

"No matter; come back into the room. That will be the safest way. I don't want to become involved in any difficulty with the police; besides, Annette is ignorant of what has taken place, and she must be getting uneasy."

This last argument made Carnac decide to beat a retreat, but not until after he had looked over the bannisters and satisfied himself that the commissary and his men were really in the hall below. Then, and not until then, did he take refuge in the ante-chamber, where he remained with his ear to the keyhole, motioning Marcel to go and re-assure his sister. Marcel stole away on tiptoe, and Carnac could listen at his leisure. The policemen ascended the stairs noisily, without taking the slightest precaution, like men who are sure of their prey; and the commissary was talking to one of his subordinates, Graindorge, no doubt, for Carnac overheard this remark: "Don't forget to tell me the name of the young man who works

at Monsieur Gerfaut's, and who knows the fellow we are about to arrest. He must be the first witness summoned, and I shall perhaps question him a little myself as soon as I have got Plantin off to the station-house."

The party passed on, and Carnac once more opened the door in order not to lose the concluding scene of this exciting drama. He heard first the significant clinking of the tools as the locksmith set his box on the floor, then the grating sound produced by the picking of the lock, which resisted some time before it yielded to the instruments which were tried one after another. When the door opened, there was a silence. The commissary entered. The suite of rooms was not extensive, and the time required to inspect it was short, for a moment afterwards the commissary's voice was again heard. "There is no one here," he said; "and yet I am sure that the man was in the room when I rang. Have either of you left your post down stairs?"

"Not for a second, sir," replied a policeman from below. "He hasn't left the house. I can vouch for that."

"Then he can be found. He must be concealed in the apartments of some other tenant. We must search them all, beginning with the one on the floor below."

This programme was not at all pleasing to Jean Carnac, who was very anxious to spare his friends, the Bruniers, the annoyance of an examination, so he instantly resolved to try and prevent it. He hastened upstairs, and found himself in the midst of a group of disappointed and exasperated police officers. "Well, gentlemen, haven't you found him?" he asked.

"Who are you?" inquired the commissary, abruptly.

"Jean Carnac, a pupil of Monsieur Gerfaut. My friend Graindorge here can vouch for me."

"Yes, I know the gentleman," replied Graindorge. "He is the person I was speaking to you about a few minutes ago."

"Well, my dear fellow," resumed Carnac, "if you had remained here after the commissary's departure you would have caught Plantin. He came down an instant after you did, and tried to gain admission into the apartment of Monsieur Brunier, who lives on the floor below. I told him that they wouldn't harbour him, and as he knew that you were watching for him in the street, he hurried upstairs again, and I thought he had re-entered his own room."

"He is not here," said the commissary, sternly, "and your friend certainly cannot object to my satisfying myself that he is not concealed downstairs."

"You will do exactly as you think best, of course, sir, but I am certain that he has found some other place of concealment. Here is a ladder fastened to the wall, and up above there is a skylight large enough for a man to crawl through. Besides, it is open. He has probably made his escape through that."

"That is possible; but in that case he must be on the roof——"

"But it is by no means certain that he is still there. His plan was to reach the next house, probably, and if he succeeded he is now beyond your reach."

The policemen present exchanged significant glances. A chase over roofs was evidently not much to their taste, nor is it to be wondered at, for such expeditions are, indeed, hardly practicable, except to those who are accustomed to such dizzy heights. "I will go," said Graindorge, with heroic simplicity.

"Alone? No, that would be too risky, especially if the man attempted to resist, and he is quite capable of it."

"Quite capable of it," chimed in Carnac, "but we two, I am sure, can manage him."

"What, sir, are you willing——"

"It isn't my business, of course, but I should like to convince you that I am not in league with the scoundrel; besides, I am very sure-footed, and not at all inclined to dizziness. Graindorge will assist me, for I have no right to arrest the man, of course. I can only help the authorities."

"That is true, so I will go up first," said Graindorge, climbing the ladder.

Carnac removed his frock-coat, folded it carefully, and laid it over the bannister, remarking: "Graindorge ought to have done the same; his long overcoat will be in his way."

Graindorge had already disappeared through the skylight, and Carnac followed suit. On reaching the top of the ladder and raising his head through the aperture, he saw the plucky policeman already astride on the roof; so he prepared to join him. Fortunately the slope of the roof was very gradual, and as the weather was dry, one could clamber up without much danger of slipping. Our brave student of nature courageously began the ascent and effected it safely. "Well, here we are, old fellow," he remarked, as he sat down beside Graindorge, "but I can't imagine what Adrien has done with himself."

"I am equally in the dark, though I am inclined to think that he must have managed to crawl to that chimney stack between the two houses."

"But even if he did, what could he have done with himself afterwards? Let himself down the chimney? He is too big to play the chimney-sweep."

"He has perhaps managed to get on the other side of the chimney, and in that case we must do the same."

"That will be a difficult matter, it strikes me. Let us begin by getting our bearings. The Rue Labat must be on this side. There are four windows on the front of the house, and four garret windows projecting from the roof. The two under us are those of Adrien's apartment; the other two belong to a neighbour's rooms."

"He has taken refuge there, perhaps."

"No, he is far too shrewd for that; he knows very well that he can't get out of the scrape in that way, for he would have been obliged to leave the house by the staircase, which is guarded. Let us look now on the other side. There are no windows here, only a couple of skylights. They are closed, and a piece of lead spouting is the only communication between the eaves and the court-yard below, which is as deep and narrow as a well, so it would be impossible for him to escape in that direction."

"But on our left, beyond that row of houses, there is the Rue Marcadet."

"That is too far off. He wouldn't think of undertaking an hour's journey over the roofs."

"Behind me the Rue Ramey intersects the Rue Labat some fifty yards from here."

"That is too near. Adrien must have gone in the opposite direction, and concealed himself behind that chimney, as you suggested, expecting that some one would come up here in search of him."

"He is there still, perhaps."

"I doubt it; but let us go and see, all the same," said Carnac. "I will go first: do exactly what you see me do, and you will come out all right."

Carnac, who had been sitting astride the roof, facing Graindorge, now turned with cat-like agility, and began to crawl along the ridge on his hands and knees. His companion followed his example. The only spectators were the swallows and pigeons perched upon the neighbouring roofs, for none of the officers had ventured to follow them. The commissary had made up his mind to scale the ladder, and his head was now above the level of the roof, but he did not evince the slightest desire to venture any further, and contented himself with shouting encouragement to the brave fellows who were risking their lives to arrest Adrien. Annette and her brother were awaiting the conclusion of this singular adventure in their own apartments, for Marcel, who had returned for a moment to the landing after re-assuring his sister, had beaten another hasty retreat, as he did not hear Carnac's voice, and was in ignorance as to where he had gone.

In the meantime the young sculptor was slowly nearing the goal, and Graindorge regulated his movements by his leader's, keeping close to him in order to be at hand in case of an attack.

"We must look like two frogs," remarked Carnac, who had lost none of his cheerfulness. "I am glad that I took off my coat; but if we have to go on in this way much longer, my trousers will be a thing of the past."

The chimney towards which they were directing their course was tall and massive. Built for the use of the two houses, it had seven or eight flues, from which rose as many sheet-iron chimney-caps, which clattered and revolved in the wind like so many whirligigs. It formed a cube of masonry springing from a zinc platform large enough for a man to stand upon, and it was as thick and substantial as a bastion. What was beyond this mass of brick and mortar? Probably a continuation of the roof; but from their present position the pursuers were unable to decide with certainty. Carnac, who was the first to reach the chimney, got upon his feet and assisted his companion to do the same. Then they paused for a moment to listen, but could hear only the moaning of the wind in the flues. Heavy clouds had suddenly gathered over the sky, and the rain, which seemed likely to fall at any minute, threatened to make their position still more perilous. But it was too late to draw back, nor did Carnac even think of such a thing. "If you will take my advice, you will go round one end of the chimney while I go round the other," he said. "Then, you see, if our man is hiding on the other side, we shall both come upon him at the same time."

"Oh, it isn't at all likely that he has remained here," replied Graindorge.

"One can never tell. Keep your eyes open, and don't let him take you unawares. Let us try to get round to the other side at the same time."

Graindorge gave a nod of acquiescence, and they separated, Carnac turning to the right, the policeman to the left. They clung as tightly as they could to the projecting points in the masonry, and walking along the narrow cornice, upon which it was no easy matter to maintain one's footing, they finally succeeded in reaching the other side of the chimney.

Carnac, who was more agile than Graindorge, passed the corner two or three seconds in advance of the latter, and, just as he did so, Adrien, who was lying in wait for him, sprang forward with both hands outstretched

and gave him a push that threw him off the narrow platform; then, suddenly turning, the rascal sprang upon Graindorge, and, finding the policeman bent on defending himself, he seized him round the body to dash him to the ground. Carnac had lost his footing, but had, fortunately, fallen upon his stomach instead of backwards. He slipped down the sloping roof, of course, and although the inclination was very gradual, it was in vain that he endeavoured to secure a hold. Sliding still lower and lower, he reached the gutter, which was of considerable depth, and formed part of the roof itself, instead of being merely attached to it. His legs went beyond, but, by a herculean effort, he managed to hold on by his elbows, and in this way he remained suspended in the air. He felt that it was all over with him; but, in spite of the peril of his situation, his brain was still clear, and he was fully aware of all that had taken place on the platform. "The scoundrel will turn his attention to me as soon as he has put an end to Graindorge," he thought. "I shall never see Annette again."

Nevertheless, he clung to the gutter with all the energy of despair, fully realising that if he could succeed in getting even one knee on to this substantial support he was saved. He tried. But it seemed to him as if a giant's foot had suddenly been pressed upon the muscles of his arms; and the bones of his breast and shoulders cracked under the terrible strain brought upon them. He began to raise his right leg to a level with the gutter, and his knee had almost touched it, when an intense pain, followed by a sensation of numbness, suddenly paralysed his movements. "An attack of cramp!" he murmured. "Ah, this time I'm done for."

He recollected that he had sometimes had a similar attack while swimming, and that the only cure had been to keep perfectly still. So he desisted from his efforts, and waited. How long? The minutes seemed ages, and there came over him a terrible consciousness that his rigid muscles were gradually relaxing. He tried to look and see what lay beneath him, but vertigo seized him, and he was obliged to close his eyes. The yawning void below seemed suddenly to have a strange fascination for him; and the house to which he clung apparently oscillated to and fro. He began to think of death as a deliverance, and he was about to allow himself to drop into the depths below, when, on opening his eyes again, he saw upon the cornice, only a few inches from his face, the artificial rose which Annette Brunier had given him. He had placed it between his shirt and waistcoat, directly over his heart, and it had fallen out as he slipped down the roof. The image of the young girl, which the sight of this flower suddenly invoked, lent him fresh courage and hope. He summoned up all his remaining strength to resist for a few seconds longer. His numbness gradually left him, and he finally succeeded in getting his knee upon the cornice. The rest became a mere trifle when he had thus secured a firm place of support. With the assistance of his elbows, he succeeded in raising his entire body, and could consider himself saved, unless Adrien returned to the charge.

The student of nature had regained all his wonted coolness and presence of mind. He took good care to make no noise, for he needed time to rest and take breath before encountering any new dangers, but he raised his head to see if his enemy was still waiting for him on the platform where he had previously attacked him. To his surprise he could see no one; Adrien had disappeared. Had he rolled into the street, pushed over by Graindorge? Carnac almost hoped so, for if the struggle was to be re-

peated the scoundrel would have all the advantages of a dominant position. His sinister countenance was not visible, however, and Carnac began the ascent of the roof, which was certainly less rapid, but also less dangerous, than his descent had been. He reached the ridge without accident, and gave vent to a sigh of relief when he found himself on the narrow zinc-covered platform around the base of the chimney. His first thought was to look for the policeman, and seeing nothing of him, he approached that side of the roof which sloped towards the Rue Labat. An object suddenly attracted his attention; it was Graindorge's cap, lying in the open drain. "He is dead," muttered Carnac, overwhelmed with consternation. "The villain has thrown him from the roof."

Just then he heard a doleful voice crying "Help, help," and looking down, he saw Adrien clinging to a leaden pipe that served as a vent for the drain. "You wretch!" shouted Carnac, shaking his fist, "you have murdered my comrade, but I have you now."

"No," faltered Adrien, "I swear that I didn't kill him. He has gone to call the others. But it isn't necessary; I surrender."

"You had better surrender, for you can't escape us now. I shall keep an eye on you until the others come."

"Oh, I shan't try to escape now. But help me on to the roof again."

"What for, I should like to know? Stay where you are. It's a very good place for you."

"But don't you see that my strength is failing me? I shall fall, if you don't lend me a hand."

Carnac felt no compassion for the wretch, but he said to himself that his testimony might be needed to ensure the conviction of Madame de Carouge. "I won't lend you a hand, but only a foot," he replied, at last. "That's quite good enough for you," and seating himself upon the platform he extended his right leg.

Adrien seized hold of it; but instead of using it as a support in climbing, he gave it such a violent jerk that Carnac only narrowly escaped losing his balance. Fortunately, however, he had felt a vague suspicion of the villain's intentions, and before offering him his foot he had taken the precaution to clutch firmly at an iron rod which served as a stay for the chimney, and this enabled him to keep his seat. However, Adrien persevered in his attempts to drag him down, and shouted savagely: "Yes, I killed the sneak. I sent him crashing into the street below, where I am going to send you after him. I shall fall with you; but I don't care, as there is no chance of my escape. Ah! if I only hadn't lost my footing with that d——d spy!"

And shrieking out a long string of the vilest epithets, Adrien renewed the attack with so much vigour that Carnac, although he gripped the iron bar convulsively with both hands, was in imminent danger of being dragged from his lofty perch. At last, raising his left foot, and summoning up all his strength, he aimed such a well-directed kick at the head of the brigand that the latter relaxed his hold, and fell heavily into the street, uttering the most frightful shrieks and imprecations. Marie Bracieux was partially avenged, since one of her assassins had just expiated the crime which he had committed, or abetted. But Gerfaut, whose sight Margot had destroyed, was not avenged at all. This was the first thought that occurred to Jean Carnac. The second he devoted to Annette Brunier, whom he had feared he would never see again.

## VII.

THE drama in the Rue Labat had terminated in such an unexpected manner that Jean Carnac found it necessary to make a sudden change in all his plans. The unfortunate Graindorge, hurled from the roof of a five-storied house, had not survived his terrible fall, and his murderer had met with a similar fate. Precipitated into space by the vigorous kick which Carnac had bestowed upon him, his skull had been smashed on the pavement below. Colache, who was on guard in the street, had seen his brave comrade fall but a few feet from him, and the body of the scoundrel the commissary had hoped to arrest had struck the pavement with a heavy thud only a few moments afterwards. Neither of them showed the slightest sign of life after the fall, and, in presence of this double catastrophe, it seemed as if one would have to close the investigation at the very outset. Such, at least, was the opinion of the commissary and the magistrates to whom the case had been entrusted. It is true that none of them knew what Jean Carnac knew, although their ignorance was not due to any backwardness in questioning him. He had related his adventure on the roof, abstaining, however, from any allusion to the concluding scene, and for the best of reasons. He had certainly only acted in self-defence in ridding himself of Adrien; but a murder is a murder, and the person who commits it is bound to explain and justify his conduct. He is consequently exposed to countless annoyances, especially as magistrates are naturally suspicious, and ask for proof in addition to energetic assertions. So Carnac, easy in his own conscience, thought he could allow the final incident to go untold, but with this exception he related every particular with scrupulous exactitude. He did not forget to dwell upon the danger that he had incurred, and as two occupants of an adjoining house had seen him hanging from the cornice, no one questioned his assertions.

Three days after the events we have just related the affair was well-nigh forgotten, both at the Prefecture and at the Palais de Justice; and this result was due in a great measure to Carnac, who considered it advisable not to disclose the connection which had existed between Adrien and Margot, nor the confession which the former had made of the crime committed by his feminine accomplice. Carnac certainly desired her arrest, but he feared he should make a blunder if he handed her over to justice without securing further proofs against her. Adrien's assertions could not be accepted without reservation, and the written evidence which Carnac now possessed was worthless unless he could compare it with Madame de Carouge's handwriting. It was necessary to procure an authentic letter from her, and that was no easy matter. Besides, what Carnac desired above everything was to unmask M. de Charny, in order to save Mademoiselle Gerfaut; but, so far, there was no conclusive proof that the count was either the lover or accomplice of Margot; and last, but not by any means least, the young sculptor was anxious to avoid any scandal which would rebound upon Camille, whose intended marriage had been publicly announced. Justice must be done, but quietly, and with the least possible publicity. The poor old sculptor, Gerfaut, and his daughter must be convinced that they had been duped by an unscrupulous, designing man, and then the duty of dealing with him according to his deserts must be left to them.

But in this task, also, Carnac seemed destined to encounter well-nigh insurmountable obstacles. In the first place, time was lacking, for the marriage was close at hand. Then Gerfaut and Camille were both so deeply infatuated with the count that they would certainly only yield to the most convincing proofs. How could he convince them of the truth they refused to believe in? "None are so deaf as those who won't hear," runs the proverb, and this was a striking example of its truth. Carnac spent two whole days in trying to devise some means of accomplishing his aim; and his attention was so deeply absorbed that he even neglected his friends in the Rue Labat. Nevertheless, it was for them he was working now, especially for Marcel, whom he hoped to rid of a dangerous rival.

After his previous failure, he dared not venture to call on Madame de Carouge again, as her maid would certainly recognise him. He was in this state of doubt and perplexity when one morning he found himself face to face with Madame Langoumois on the Place Moncey. He had not seen her since the night of the ball at the Elysée; in fact, he had forgotten all about her, and had even neglected to pay for the hire of that marvellous costume which had gained him the honour of Margot's acquaintance. However, on meeting the old woman he suddenly remembered her former acquaintance with Margot, and the thought occurred to him that he might secure valuable information from her, and perhaps even transform her into a valuable auxiliary. So he proceeded to greet her in the most affable manner, although she received his advances with marked coolness. "And how is Madame Langoumois?" he asked pleasantly, tapping her on the shoulder.

"Not very well. Business is dull, very dull; and even you, young man, have treated me very shabbily. You promised to pay me at the end of the week; and, although you are not rich, still, I think, you might have managed to spare the paltry twelve francs you owe me."

"Here are twenty, madame. The surplus is for interest."

"A napoleon! You must have come into a fortune."

"No, I have won a prize in a lottery, and I am rolling in gold. I am squandering it right and left; so if you want any you have only to earn it."

"Which I should be very glad to do, I assure you, providing I could do so honestly."

"What do you take me for? What I mean is that I need some information which I think you can furnish."

"About whom or what?"

"About that Margot we were talking of the other day in your shop."

"I told you all I knew about her then. She left Paris several years ago, and I haven't seen or heard anything of her since."

"Well, she has returned to Paris."

"I am glad to hear it, for she was one of my best customers, and I shan't be sorry to have her patronage again. I am sorry that I don't know where she lives."

"I know it."

"Then give me her address. She always has some dresses to sell—dresses one can dispose of again at a good profit, for she isn't hard-fisted by any means—that is, unless there has been a great change in her."

"Well, she lives at the corner of the Rue d'Anjou and the Rue Lavoisier. She goes by the name of Madame de Carouge now."

"What! she has changed her name again! She was Madame de Linas

seven or eight years ago. She always clings to the *de*. But that is no business of mine, and I shan't fail to pay her a visit to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"Are you in such a hurry as all that? But why are you so anxious for me to go? If you mean to injure her in any way I tell you, once for all, that I won't go. I have made a good deal of money by her, and I shall probably make more, so I have no idea of taking sides against her."

"There isn't the slightest need for you to do that. But tell me, had you your shop on the Boulevard Rochechouart when you sold her laces and bought her cast-off dresses?"

"No, I lived in the Rue de Provence then, and she in the Rue Taitbout. I haven't been in my present quarters for more than three years. But come, I should very much like to know why you are so anxious to find out about her."

"Well, I don't mind telling you, as you are an old friend. I met her the other night at the Elysée ball, and took quite a fancy to her. She didn't seem to dislike me, but her lover was watching her, and it was he who was lying in wait for me outside, with two or three of his associates, when I entered your shop to change my clothes. I have received a letter since, making an appointment for next Saturday, but I am afraid this letter comes from the lover, who may want to get me into a lonely place to do for me. If I were sure that the letter came from Margot I should go, but to be sure of that I must see a few lines of her handwriting."

"I understand, but——"

"So a plan occurred to me. If you purchase one of her dresses from her you can ask her for a receipt, can't you?"

"That isn't customary; still, if you are so anxious for it, I might, perhaps, manage it; but not this morning, for the very good reason that I have only three francs in my pocket, and we always have to pay cash in such cases."

"If that is the only difficulty I will advance you the money. Do you want ten, fifteen, or twenty-five louis? Speak, they are at your service."

As he spoke Carnac fumbled about in his trousers' pocket, and drew out a handful of gold, which he offered to his astonished companion. Since Annette had so openly expressed her aversion for the money won at the gaming-table, Carnac had abandoned all idea of hoarding it up to bestow it upon her as a dowry. On the contrary, he was almost anxious to get rid of this ill-acquired wealth, and he had drawn frequently on the famous leather belt in which he had placed his money for safe keeping. Still, as he had no expensive habits, the greater part of the ten thousand francs remained. "Does all that money belong to you?" asked Madame Langoumois.

"It would seem so," replied Carnac, gaily. "I am rich now, and I think strongly of purchasing some new furniture, and renewing my wardrobe. I need not tell you that I shall patronise you, so you must not hesitate about accepting this on account. Take what you need for your transaction with Madame de Carouge, and bring me a receipt, and we will call it square, or you can pay me in goods, whichever you please."

"Nothing could suit me better. I am expected at the shop, but if you think I shall find Margot at home——"

"I am almost sure that you will. She can hardly be an early riser. Come, I will show you the way; but take your money first."

"Not without counting it. I am an honest woman, young man," re-

plied Madame Langoumois, extending her hand to Carnac, who dropped one coin after another into her open palm. "There are nineteen," she remarked, after counting them. "I owe you three hundred and sixty-eight francs, and now——"

"Now we have only to walk down the Rue d'Amsterdam, and then turn to the right into the Rue Saint-Lazare. We shall be there in a quarter of an hour. Remember, it is all for your own good, Madame Langoumois."

"And for your pleasure, you naughty boy. It doesn't surprise me to hear that Margot has taken a fancy to you. She always had a weakness for handsome young men. But is she still pretty, then, that you are so mad about her?"

"She is superb, Madame Langoumois."

"How about her scar?"

"It isn't visible now."

"It's true that she knows how to conceal it very cleverly. I gave her a lesson or two myself in the art. Besides, with time, scars show less plainly."

"Who disfigured her in such a manner? That lover of hers?"

"No; she had it before she made his acquaintance. She was a girl who began life badly. She was always followed about by half-a-dozen rascals who were capable of anything—even of wringing her neck to obtain possession of her jewels."

"That is why I have my doubts about this pretended appointment in the Cours la Reine, at eleven o'clock at night, and why I am so anxious to know if the letter is in her handwriting."

"I know her writing, and if you will show me the note——"

"Unfortunately, I haven't got it about me," interrupted Carnac, who would have found himself in a dilemma had he been compelled to produce the note in question.

"Well, you can bring it to me then, if I don't succeed in getting a scrap of writing from Margot; and I may not, for she may have nothing to sell."

"But you will see her, in any case. You must tell me how she is situated. I should like to know."

"Why don't you pay her a call openly?"

"I am not such a fool. Her lover might be there, and then I should be in a fine scrape. Don't even mention my name, for perhaps, as I said before, the letter never came from her. And on the other hand, if it did, if she really wrote requesting me to meet her in the Champs Elysées, it's because she doesn't wish me to come to her house."

"Then she must know your address."

"Yes; I gave it to her on the night of the ball, and she gave me her's as well."

"Well, I'm surprised that she told you where she lived, and the new name she had assumed, for she usen't to be so free."

"I have an idea that she wanted to impress me with a sense of her importance. She even told me that she was going to purchase a house in a fashionable neighbourhood, and that she was merely staying in the Rue d'Anjou temporarily. I should like you to find out if this is true, and besides, you will easily see if she is well off or not."

This conversation engrossed Carnac and Madame Langoumois until they reached the Rue d'Anjou. Here the sculptor halted, and said to his

companion: "It is time for us to separate. As I told you before, the house is at the corner of the Rue Lavoisier. You can easily find it without my assistance. It wouldn't do for us to be seen together by Margot, and she might be sitting at the window. I will go and wait for you in the square, in front of the Expiatory Chapel."

"I shan't stay long."

"Oh, take your time. I've nothing to do, and when I have my pipe with me, I never get impatient. You haven't forgotten the programme, I hope."

"You need have no fear of that. Light your pipe and puff away, while I have a talk with Margot. Till by-and-by."

As she spoke, Madame Langoumois trotted off as rapidly as her bulk would permit of, well pleased to render our friend Carnac a service, and still better pleased to renew her acquaintance with a person who had been one of her best customers in former years, and who must be even more extravagant than before, now that she had made a fortune. She had no difficulty in finding the house, which was very respectable in appearance, and the porter told her that Madame de Carouge was at home. However, when Madame Langoumois presented herself at the door of the flat she was met by the same maid who had worsted Carnac so badly the morning after the ball, and who now began by declaring that her mistress could see nobody. But Madame Langoumois would not acknowledge herself defeated. She insisted on being admitted, swearing that she had come on important business, and that Madame de Carouge would never forgive her maid for sending an old friend away. She expostulated most vehemently, raising her voice to its highest pitch, and to such good purpose that a door finally opened, and the face of the mistress of the apartment appeared.

"I told you she would see me!" cried Madame Langoumois, triumphantly, pushing past the maid who had barred her passage.

"What, Clarisse, is this you?" exclaimed Madame de Carouge, in profound astonishment.

"Yes, madame, it's I; and I am very glad to see you, for this young woman seemed determined to prevent me from coming in."

"I am at your service," Madame de Carouge replied, after a moment's hesitation. With these words she disappeared into the room she had just come from; but returning a moment later, she flung the door wide open for a handsome young man who came out with his hat on his head and crossed the antechamber without honouring Carnac's ambassadress with a glance. "Come in now," said Madame de Carouge.

Madame Langoumois needed no urging; on the contrary, she darted into the drawing-room, and exclaimed: "Well, I have found you at last! We can speak freely, now that your maid is out of the way. How are you, my dear little Margot? And where did you come from? And so you have renewed your intimacy with your old admirer?"

Madame de Carouge evinced no great eagerness to reply to this flood of questions, but seemed to be divided between gratification at again meeting one of her old friends, and a fear that her visitor might have come with hostile intentions. "I say this," resumed Madame Langoumois, who was not easily disconcerted, "because I recognised that handsome fellow who just went out, from having seen him so often at your house before you left Paris. He is still a handsome man, there is no doubt about it, and you have not changed either, or rather you have changed for the better, and

you are as fresh as a rose, to say nothing of the fact that your affairs must be prospering, from what I see. I scent wealth and luxury here. I hope you are not going to run in debt again for a man's sake. The one who just went out certainly cost you enough in former years. But I'm sure that you have become more sensible now. Experience is always worth something to everybody."

"Well, and how did you learn my name and address?" asked Margot, smiling.

"I learned it by the merest chance," was the prompt reply. "I hadn't the slightest idea that you were in Paris until I met you the day before yesterday on the Boulevard Haussmann. You did not see me, but I recognised you in an instant, though I didn't venture to speak to you, as you were not alone."

"I was with a lady, wasn't I—a stout lady?" inquired Madame de Carouge, who had been out shopping with Madame Stenay on the day mentioned.

"Yes, a lady almost, if not quite, as stout as I am," replied Madame Langoumois, with wonderful assurance. "As I didn't know her, and was afraid of compromising you, I only followed you. But I saw you enter this house, so I questioned the porter—"

"I certainly hope that you did not ask for Margot?"

"Of course not; I merely mentioned the first name that came into my head, and asked him if that wasn't the name of the lady who had just entered the house. Well, your porter replied that I was mistaken, for the young lady's name was Madame de Carouge. That was all I wanted to know, so I went away, promising myself that I would come back again. I was busy all day yesterday, but this morning I had nothing particular to do, so I said to myself: 'I certainly must go and have a talk with my little Margot, who used to be one of my very best customers.'"

"Much better than I shall be now, for I am no longer obliged to buy things cheap, or on credit either."

"Oh, I was satisfied of that. With your figure and your natural shrewdness, you ought to have made your fortune long ago. You had only to say the word, but you wouldn't. But you have come to your senses at last! Tell me your adventures."

"Oh! it is all as plain as daylight. You know that I was terribly embarrassed when you saw me last. I owed no end of money—I owed everybody, in fact."

"Except me. You kept me waiting sometimes, but you always paid me finally."

"Because I did not want to injure a friend who had done me so many favours. But I did not pay the others, and writs fell around me as thick and fast as hail. I finally concluded that the best thing I could do was to take an unceremonious leave of my creditors. I secured an engagement in Russia—you know I have a fairly good voice—and sang in operetta at a small theatre in St. Petersburg. I saw some pretty hard times during the first year, but afterwards I caught a prince, a real prince."

"That doesn't surprise me. And then roubles, instead of writs, began to rain upon you. All Russian princes are millionaires."

"In that you are very much mistaken. There are plenty of bankrupt ones; but I happened to fall in with a rich one—a man who possessed an income of some eight hundred thousand francs a year. He took me to his estates, where I remained for three years. He led me a dance, I assure

you ; and I was positively bored to death. Well, at the end of three years I lal enough of it ; I could stand it no longer. I was terribly homesick, and I could not keep my feet still. Every night I dreamed of Mabilie and the Moulin de la Galette."

"So you have returned to resume your old pranks again ? You make a great mistake."

"Don't be alarmed. No one will find it out. The past is buried, and Margot is dead and forgotten by every one excepting you. I go into the very best society now, and have money enough to live as I choose. If I choose to marry, I shall marry."

"You would make a great mistake, especially if you intend to marry that young man I just saw."

"Oh ! dear no ! But I found myself face to face with him the other day in the flower-market. I could not pretend not to know him, and he asked to come and see me. But don't be alarmed. My fancy for him is a thing of the past, and so is his for me. Besides, he is richer than I am, and he will soon be still better off."

"Bah ! Still it is possible after all. All the same, I advise you not to trust that fellow too much. I don't know what he does : I don't even know his name, and I am not anxious to know it, but if I were in your place I should not see him too often, more especially as he might take it into his head to blab, or try to make you pay for his silence."

"There is no danger of that," replied Madame de Carouge, smiling.

"So much the better !" said Madame Langoumois. "Still, all this is no business of mine. Let us talk of something else. You haven't forgotten, I see, that I had the pleasure of doing you many a favour years ago ; and you certainly won't refuse to do me one in return."

"No, certainly not. But how ?"

"By putting me in a way to earn a little money. It will come in very handy now, as business is so bad. Would you believe it, I have been obliged to give up my establishment in the Rue de Provence, as I was doing absolutely nothing there."

"Where are you living now ?"

"At No. 89 Rue des Martyrs. I have no shop now," replied Madame Langoumois, mindful of Carnac's instructions.

"I should certainly be very glad to serve you, but, unfortunately, I see no way to do it. I can't purchase goods of you myself, and——"

"And your acquaintances are persons who have no dealings with second-hand clothes shops. I understand ; but that need not prevent you from selling me some of your old dresses, and cast-off bonnets. I could turn them to account among the flash girls in our neighbourhood."

"No, there is nothing to prevent that, except that Celine would be furious with me."

"Celine is your maid, of course, and you give her your cast-off clothes, Well, I'll negotiate with her, or better than that, I'll buy of you and allow her a liberal percentage. I shall be the gainer by it, as I'm sure you won't be too exacting about the price. For you certainly wouldn't be hard on an old friend who's devoted to you, and who will perhaps some day find an opportunity to serve you again. You know me, and know that I can be trusted."

Madame de Carouge listened attentively, and the suggestion probably seemed to her worthy of consideration, for she replied : "That's true. You have qualities which I appreciate, and it is by no means impossible

that I may wish to avail myself of them at some future time. Since you seem so anxious to buy my old dresses, I will tell Celine to show them to you, and the next time you come we can perhaps make some satisfactory arrangement. I haven't the time now. I am expected at the house of the lady who was with me when you saw me in the street the other day."

"Oh, it won't take long, and I don't want to go away empty-handed. Sell me those two dresses which are lying there on the sofa; you will never wear them again, for they are very shabby."

"They are not in the least shabby; still, you can have them if you like. They cost five hundred francs apiece. How much will you give me for them?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," replied Madame Langoumois, unfolding the dresses and feeling the silk. "You were cheated, my dear. They were worth scarcely three hundred francs when they were new. However, I will give you two hundred francs for the two, and sixty francs extra for your maid."

"You haven't changed in the least," said Madame de Carouge, laughing. "You are the same sharp creature in trade. At that price, you will make one hundred per cent. on your bargain. I must say that your ten napoleons have no great attraction for me."

"Oh, I know that you don't need the money; but you might make a sacrifice to oblige an old friend. Besides, it is so much clear gain to you—the same as if you found the money in the street."

Madame de Carouge reflected for an instant, and then exclaimed: "Speaking of things that are found, I think you might perhaps assist me in recovering possession of something I have lost."

"I am quite at your service, my dear. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing very difficult. Before my departure for Russia I pawned my jewels. But I took good care to renew the tickets every year. I sent the money regularly through a friend."

"It would have been much better for you to have redeemed the things as soon as you were able to do so."

"I had my reasons for not doing so. One of the articles did not belong to me, and I did not wish my friend to see it; so I waited until my return to France about a week ago, when I went in person to redeem my property. Would you believe it, on the way from the Mont-de-Piété to my house, I lost one of the objects—the very one I prized the most?"

"You certainly were unlucky! Did you advertise for it?"

"No, I didn't; for the reason that I should have been obliged to give my name and address, which I did not wish to do. But I would give a handsome amount to regain possession of the ring without any one knowing that I was the person who lost it. It is a large seal ring; and the fact is it was given me seven or eight years ago by a gentleman whom I loved very much, but whom you never saw. He is dead now, and this ring was the only memento left me of him."

"I can understand why you should set great value on it," said Madame Langoumois, hypocritically.

"I do, and I shouldn't have pawned it if I had not been in the greatest need. But you can also understand why I didn't wish my name to appear in the matter. I was Margot when I pawned the ring, and I fear that from Margot folks might arrive at Madame de Carouge. It occurred to me, just now, that you might be able to get me out of the difficulty by advertising for the ring yourself, and by going to the lost property office at the Prefecture."

"Nothing could be easier. I would do far more than that to oblige you. I haven't much hope of finding the ring at the Prefecture—for the honest people who rush off to place whatever they find in the hands of the nearest commissary of police are becoming very scarce; but if you offer a liberal reward, you will have some chance of recovering the ring, especially if it is of no great value."

"It is scarcely worth two hundred francs, and I would gladly give three hundred to recover it."

"Then my advertisement will be answered."

"More especially as the finder can't wear the ornament. There is a coat-of-arms engraved upon the stone, an amethyst."

"An amethyst isn't worth much. I had better describe the ring, and head the advertisement with the words: 'Three Hundred Francs Reward.' I will conclude by saying: 'Apply to Madame Langoumois, No. 89 Rue des Martyrs.' Where do you think you lost the ring? On leaving the main office in the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux?"

"No, on leaving the branch office in the Rue Fromentin. I didn't discover the loss until I reached home, and then I recollected that I had glanced at the jewels in the hall of the establishment, and afterwards wrapped them up in a piece of paper. I probably dropped the ring in putting the package in my pocket."

"Then I had better go to the clerks and inquire if such an article has been picked up in the establishment?"

"That would do no good, I'm sure. They took my address when I redeemed the jewellery, and had any of the articles been found and returned to them, they would have written to me."

"We shall have to resort to advertising, then, and I shall do so extensively."

"Still, it will be necessary to proceed with great care," said Madame de Carouge, who acted as if this were an exceedingly delicate matter. "You must be active, and yet extremely prudent, for I have reasons to believe that the ring has been found by some one who is capable of using it to injure me."

"That would certainly be very strange."

"I will tell you what has occurred, so you may see for yourself. On the day immediately following the loss, and while I was still in bed, a shabbily-dressed young man called to see me. He told Celine that he had come to bring me a piece of jewellery I had lost. I was greatly surprised, for how could this person have discovered my name and address? I couldn't imagine. The act seemed decidedly suspicious to me. I have several enemies, and I am obliged to be on my guard, so I sent him word that I had no idea what he meant, and begged that he would not disturb me. Celine tells me that he went off in a very bad humour."

"Didn't you see him? If I had been in your place I should have taken a look at him through the keyhole, at least."

"I did not think of that until too late. Then I raised my window blind to look at him as he walked down the street, but he was too far off for me to see him distinctly. I could only see that he was a tall, powerful-looking fellow. Well, this affair showed me that some people I don't know were occupying themselves about me; and it is for this reason that I so strongly advise prudence; for it is possible, and even probable, that the person I just spoke of will see your advertisement, and will call upon you respecting it."

"Ah, well, in that case, I shall tell him that the ring is mine, pay him the reward agreed upon, and dismiss him."

"But I shouldn't be surprised if he questioned you and tried to extort some information about me. In that case, I beg of you to weigh every word you utter, and let nothing escape you which can possibly compromise me."

"That will be a very easy matter, I'm sure. If he speaks of a Madame de Carouge, I shall tell him that I am acquainted with no person of that name."

"And if he said anything about Margot, what would you reply then?"

"I should give him the same answer, and ask him if he takes me for the head of a detective agency. Have no fears, my little Margot, I'll shut his mouth so effectually that he won't feel the slightest desire to open it again. I will bring you your ring, never fear. But tell me how I am to identify it."

"You need only examine the coat-of-arms; there is a count's coronet above the shield. Upon the latter there are three eagles, and around it, a motto which you can read with the aid of a magnifying glass. I don't recollect the motto exactly. In fact, I can only recall the last words: *Nothing but my arm.*"

"I will remember that. I'm not afraid of making any mistake, now. You will see that old Langoumois is no simpleton, and that she can be trusted even with a delicate mission. And now as I am only detaining you, I will pay you for the dresses and go. I think I have some customers who will take them off my hands immediately."

"Then give sixty francs to Celine and take the dresses. I will let you have them at the price you mention, but you need not pay me, as you may be called upon to hand out three hundred francs for me at any moment. It is I, on the contrary, who must give you a hundred to make up the amount."

But this arrangement did not suit Madame Langoumois at all, for she had promised Carnac to bring him a scrap of Madame de Carouge's handwriting; however, as she had an ingenious mind, she soon succeeded in finding an excuse for proceeding differently. "No, no," she replied, "business is business, and I forgot to tell you that as I have no shop now I do business through another woman, an old friend of mine. In fact, she is my partner, and, of course, I am obliged to account to her. So I will pay you the money for the dresses, and you must give me a receipt for it."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. It isn't worth while to go to so much trouble about two hundred francs. Besides, what name should I sign?"

"Sign yourself 'Marguerite de Carouge,' of course. I know that it isn't your real name, but the receipt is for my partner. No one else will ever see it."

"Very well, then," said Margot, after hesitating a moment. "Count out your two hundred francs and lay them there on the table. I will do what you wish, because I know that I can rely upon you implicitly."

"In this matter, as in everything else," exclaimed her companion, counting out the gold, while Margot wrote upon a sheet of paper, "Received of Madame Langoumois the sum of two hundred francs, as payment in full for two silk dresses sold to her."

"All the same," said Madame de Carouge, "this is very absurd, for you will be put to expense about the ring. You had much better keep your money."

"Not at all. I don't know what the advertisement will cost as yet, and before paying the reward I shall see you again." Then glancing at the receipt, Madame Langoumois placed it in one of her huge pockets, and added: "Some one is waiting for you, you said. Well, I will detain you no longer. I will take myself and my unruly tongue off——"

"And your dresses," said Madame de Carouge, laughing. "When shall I see you again? I am always at home in the morning."

"I will call again in three or four days—possibly sooner. I am going to advertise for the ring to-day, and as soon as I hear anything about it, I will warn you. Besides, you have my address, if you wish to see me."

Having said this, Madame Langoumois folded the dresses, hung them over her left arm, took leave of her old customer, slipped sixty francs into the hand of the maid who accompanied her to the door, and rolled downstairs like a huge ball.

Carnac, who was smoking his pipe on a bench in the square facing the so-called expiatory chapel erected in memory of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, rose on perceiving his ambassadress, and went to meet her. "Well?" he asked, as soon as he came within speaking distance of Madame Langoumois, who was puffing like a porpoise from her rapid walk.

"Let me sit down and rest a moment, for I am completely tired out. When I have recovered breath, I will tell you some things that will interest you."

The little square is not much frequented, even in summer, and of a winter's morning there is never any one there, so Carnac and his friend could talk without fear of being interrupted or overheard. "So you have purchased some dresses, I see," began the student of nature. "But how about the receipt?"

"Oh, I have it. Margot declined to give one at first, but finally consented."

"Then Madame de Carouge and Margot are one and the same person?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt of it. I recognised Margot as soon as I set my eyes on her. It is really wonderful how little she has changed. She has grown more fleshy, especially in the face, so her scar is scarcely visible now. I should have to touch it with my hands to find it. Besides, Madame de Carouge does not deny her identity. She received me very cordially, and told me her whole story from beginning to end. It is exactly as I thought. She was reduced to the lowest depths of poverty when she left for Russia."

"She really went to Russia, then?"

"As a chorus singer in an opera troupe, yes. She made a conquest of a prince, and left him after she had laid by a fortune. She has returned to Paris very rich, and now proposes to play the fine lady. She has all the requisites for success. Her manners, even, have undergone an entire change; and she is contemplating marriage, though, as I told her, she will make a very great mistake if she attempts that."

"Marriage with whom?"

"She didn't tell me; but I should not be surprised if it was with the tall, light-haired man who squandered her money in former years. I saw him there. Margot pretends that he is a mere acquaintance now, but I don't believe a word of it. She was wild about him years ago, and a man of his stamp must have some one to prey upon. Besides, there is a story of a lost ring that sounds very suspicious to me."

"A ring lost by Madame de Carouge?"

"Yes; on leaving the Mont-de-Piété in the Rue Fromentin. It was a gentleman's ring, and Margot doesn't want any one to know that she pawned it; so she has asked me to advertise for it as if it were my own, and to offer a reward of three hundred francs to any one who will return it."

Carnac drank in these words with breathless eagerness, and asked himself if he ought to show the ring or not. On reflection he decided in the negative. The moment had not yet come. It would be better for him to keep the ring until he could exhibit it to some purpose. "Will you show me the receipt?" he asked. Madame Langoumois drew it from her pocket and handed it to him. He had only to glance at it to satisfy himself that the letter addressed to the deceased Plantin was in the same handwriting. "Will you give this to me?" he asked.

"Certainly, since it was you who furnished the funds. I also intend to reserve a part of the money I make on the transaction for you, for I am sure that I can sell the dresses at a handsome profit."

"I don't want the money; and if you will do me another favour you shall be even more liberally rewarded for your trouble."

"I should be delighted to oblige you, I'm sure. There is only one drawback. Margot is not a very good woman, it's true, but I have never had any cause to complain of her; and if you are trying to injure her in any way you will get no help from me. I consented to do what you asked in this case because you told me that she had taken a fancy to you; but I didn't extort two lines of her writing from her for you to make use of them against her."

Carnac did not hesitate. The object he had in view justified, in his eyes, the deception which he must practise to secure his companion's assistance. "It will enable me to keep the appointment she has made with me, that's all," he replied. "If you hadn't kindly satisfied me about the authenticity of the note I received I shouldn't have risked it. Now, thanks to you, I'm sure that she was the writer of it, and I shan't fail to embrace the opportunity, for Madame de Carouge is the handsomest woman I ever saw. Did you say anything to her about me?"

"No; I had promised not to mention you; and when I make a promise I keep it. Besides, I have never mixed myself up in any of Margot's love affairs. If she has taken a fancy to you, that is her business, not mine. But, as a friend, I should advise you to beware of that tall, light-haired man. If he finds that you have cut him out, you will hear from him, for I don't believe that he has renounced Margot. She is rich, and that is a great charm in his eyes, especially as she is very generous with her money—just as generous as she used to be, for she sold me two dresses for two hundred and sixty francs—dresses which are certainly worth twice the money. Look at this silk. That quality is no longer manufactured in France. It must have been made to order, and sent to Russia. It is almost new, too. I don't believe it has been worn half a dozen times; and yet she let me have it at the first figure I offered. It is very evident that she cares very little about money."

"And to think that a woman who wears such dresses should frequent the Elysée Montmartre!" sighed Carnac, who was trying to invent some excuse for leaving his companion. He was impatient to reach Gerfaut's house, now that he was armed with the necessary evidence to prove that Madame de Carouge was not only an unscrupulous and designing woman, but even worse.

"I have an idea that she won't go there again," replied Madame Langoumois. "It was a whim that she wished to gratify just once; but as she has taken it into her head to marry, she will conduct herself accordingly. She's no fool, I can tell you."

"I'm aware of that," said Carnac, who had not forgotten the evening at Madame Stenay's. "All the same, you tell me some pretty strange stories; for instance, about this ring which didn't belong to her, but which she pawned."

"She pretends that it was given her by an old lover who is now dead—a nobleman, undoubtedly—as there is a count's coronet upon the stone as well as a coat-of-arms and a family motto. She gave me a full description of it."

"Then you would have no difficulty in recognising it if it were brought to you," murmured the sculptor, foreseeing the possibility of utilising Madame Langoumois in proving the fact that Philippe de Charny, Camille Gerfaut's betrothed, had been, and was still, in league with Margot.

"Oh, there is not the slightest doubt of that," was the reply. "But I must go and order the advertisements without delay. Help me a little in folding the dresses so that I can carry them without crumpling them."

The student of nature hastened to render his ally this slight service, but he was no expert in the art of folding fabrics, and he set about the task very awkwardly. "Look!" he suddenly exclaimed, holding up one of the dresses, "this skirt is badly torn. There is quite a large piece missing from it."

"That's true," grumbled Madame Langoumois, beginning to examine the dress. "A piece as large as my hand has been torn out. I can't understand how I failed to notice it. Had I taken the time and trouble to examine it, I should have offered a hundred francs less, for it is only fit for a wrapper. It would be impossible to match the material, even if one ransacked every shop in Paris."

"The dress is utterly ruined, unquestionably," replied Carnac. "How could she have managed to get it in such a condition? She must be very careless. She probably wore it at some public ball where a greenhorn stepped on it, for, see, the piece wasn't cut out, but evidently torn away."

"Yes, and Margot must have had to give it a violent wrench to release herself, for the material is very strong. If I had not been afraid of keeping you waiting too long, I should have examined the dress more carefully, though I really don't believe that Margot had the slightest intention of cheating me."

"I'm sure she hadn't, and possibly she has already begun to regret having sold you this torn dress. But I don't want you to lose upon your purchase, so I will take it myself, and give you a hundred francs for it. Here's the money," said the student of nature, drawing five napoleons from his pocket, and forcing them into his companion's hand.

"Just as you please," replied Madame Langoumois, who could not, for the life of her, forego an opportunity to make a good bargain. "But what are you going to do with it?"

"I shall use it for draping a model. These heavy fabrics hang superbly. Besides, it will be a memento of Margot. If she discovers later on that I possess one of her cast-off dresses, I shall tell her that I purchased it out of love for her. But now go and order your advertisements, Madame Langoumois. I must hurry off to the studio. I haven't been there for

two days, and Monsieur Gerfaut must be furious. Let us divide the spoil, and each go our own way."

"But when shall I see you again, you scapegrace? You know that I am always glad to have a chat with you."

"I shall drop in at your shop sooner than you expect, perhaps."

The two allies separated. Madame Langoumois, delighted with her morning's work, took a cab to return home, and Carnac, with Margot's dress under his arm, hastened towards the Boulevard des Batignolles. Luck had certainly favoured him this time, for in less than two hours he had collected more evidence against Madame de Carouge than he had succeeded in collecting during three whole weeks. He was rapidly nearing his goal now. At least he hoped so, and he was determined not to lose a minute in attacking the enemies whom Gerfaut mistook for friends. He could now present proofs, and incontestable proofs—Margot's letter to Plantin, the receipt which was in the same handwriting as the letter, and last, but not least, the torn dress. This dress was unquestionably the one that Margot had worn when she threw the vitriol at the unfortunate Gerfaut, the dress which had been caught in the door leading into the alley. A comparison of the silk of which it was composed with the scrap deposited at the Palais de Justice would prove Madame de Carouge's participation in the twofold crime. The investigating magistrate would need no further evidence to issue a warrant for her arrest, and the jury could hardly fail to return a verdict of guilty.

Carnac reviewed all this in his own mind as he climbed the Rue de Rome towards the boulevard, but the nearer he approached his destination the more he realised certain difficulties which had at first escaped his notice. His whole scheme was based upon material verifications, and one of these verifications was impracticable, except for a commissary of police or an investigating magistrate, since the scrap missing from the dress was locked up at the Palais de Justice. The other verification was equally difficult, so far as Gerfaut was concerned, for in order to compare the hand-writings it is necessary to see clearly, and the sculptor was blind. "To convince him, it will be necessary to submit the letter and receipt to some third party," thought Carnac. "But to whom? To his daughter? That's impossible; I can't subject her to such an ordeal. To a stranger? That would be dangerous; besides, Gerfaut wouldn't have confidence in a stranger. May I be hanged if I know what to do, and yet the matter must be settled to-day. I will broach the subject, and, perhaps an inspiration will come to me. The main thing is to know if I can speak to him alone. Charny is a fixture in the drawing-room, and Gerfaut feels that he must not leave the count alone with the young lady. He is right in that, for that man is capable of anything. If he is there now, I shall send Rose up to ask the governor to step down into the studio, on the pretext that I need some instructions from him before touching up the nose of the Volunteer of '92."

Gerfaut's house was three storeys high. A broad hall, which ran through the middle of it, separated the studio from the domestic offices. The studio could be entered directly from this hall; and it could also be reached from the drawing-room on the floor above by an inner staircase. Carnac found the studio deserted—a fact which did not surprise him, however, as it was not yet one o'clock, the hour when Gerfaut was in the habit of instructing his pupil, and not unfrequently of upbraiding him for his idleness. The gatherings which had been held there almost daily

during the sculptor's convalescence had ceased some time before. The table at which Annette had worked over her flowers had been pushed back into a corner, behind a curtain, and the chairs were covered with dust. All this meant desertion, and one instantly felt that Gerfaut's life had undergone a sudden change. So, when Carnac entered the room he was a little surprised to see that preparations had been made that very morning to receive a model. The receptacle set aside for moist clay was full, the frame was arranged for a bust, and the statue of the volunteer was covered with a cloth. "What can be going on?" muttered Carnac, as he donned his working costume. "It looks very much as if the governor were going to begin work again. But he certainly hasn't regained the sight that Margot destroyed. I know that no oculist can restore that. Can he intend me to model somebody's bust in his stead? I shouldn't be sorry, upon my word! If I am going to set up housekeeping I must prepare to earn my living."

While he was engaged in these reflections, the door at the end of the studio opened, and Gerfaut appeared, leaning on the arm of a person whom Carnac saw but seldom, and of whom he was by no means fond, although he scarcely knew why. It was probably because he did not know her well enough to do justice to her many good qualities. This person was none other than Cousin Brigitte, a spinster about forty-five years of age, who had long been a member of the sculptor's household. Devoted to Gerfaut, who had taken her from the country where she was vegetating as a schoolmistress, and passionately attached to Camille, whom she had educated, this humble relative was wanting in softness and amiability of character, but she possessed many admirable traits which she tried as hard to conceal as if they had been the gravest faults. Although Carnac did not like her, he esteemed her highly; and he had scarcely set eyes on her before it occurred to him to choose her as arbitress in the charge he was about to bring against Madame de Carouge. "Good morning, master," he said, stepping forward. "Mademoiselle, I have the honour to salute you."

"What, you are here!" cried Gerfaut. "Upon my word, this is really very fortunate. I sent everywhere in search of you this morning; but you were nowhere to be found, not even in the cafés where you spend most of your time."

"Had I supposed that you needed me——"

"I should think I did need you! Madame de Carouge is to come here to sit for me at three o'clock this afternoon."

"At three o'clock!" thought Carnac. "Why, it is past two already. I haven't much time to enlighten my master about this woman's real character. Then you must wish me to take your place," he said aloud. "I feel very proud of the honour, but I must admit that it also frightens me a little. I have never worked except under your direction, and I am not quite sure of myself."

"Who has said anything to you about taking my place. I propose to do the modelling myself. It is an experiment which I am anxious to make, and in which Madame de Carouge has kindly consented to assist me. I wish to ascertain if the sense of touch can be made to replace the sense of vision in familiarising one with the features of a model, and reproducing them."

"What, sir, do you really hope to obtain a likeness by such an unheard-of method? I heard you speak of it the other day, but I thought you were only jesting."

"I never jest upon matters connected with art. I am by no means sure of success, but I intend to make the experiment. The lady promises me as many sittings as I need. If you doubt it, you have only to read a note I just received," said Gerfaut, showing his pupil a bit of paper which he had in his hand.

Carnac eagerly caught hold of it, and a single glance at it told him that the writing was exactly like that of the receipt given to Madame Langoumois, and consequently like that of the letter addressed to Adrien Plantin. Chance had sent him the needed complement to the proofs he had already secured ; for Gerfaut could not but admit the authenticity of a letter which his cousin had just unsealed and read in his presence. It was very short, this letter, consisting only of the following lines :—" Dear Master,—My face is at your service. Do as you please with it. At three o'clock precisely I shall be at your house, and I will continue to come every day at that hour until the bust is completed. You will promise me, of course, that there shall be no strangers present." Below ran the signature : "Marguerite de Carouge."

Carnac took good care not to return this note, for he was determined to use it with crushing effect in a few minutes' time. He had the other specimens of handwriting in his pocket, and he had just spread the torn dress upon the sofa. Armed with these offensive weapons, he could hardly fail to come off victorious. Still, a little manœuvring was necessary. To attack Madame de Carouge promptly and openly would be bad policy, for by doing so he would at once make Gerfaut so angry that he would, perhaps, refuse to listen. Moreover, Carnac could not dispense with Cousin Brigitte's co-operation, so it was necessary to devise some means of detaining her in the studio.

"As Madame de Carouge is so obliging, it would certainly be a pity not to try the experiment," he remarked ; "but I don't exactly see how I can be of any assistance."

"In touching up, you stupid !" exclaimed Gerfaut. "I am not vain enough to suppose that I shall secure a perfect likeness the first time, I who am blind ; I flatter myself that I shall be able to copy the principal lines of the face, but I cannot hope to avoid mistakes in minor matters. But you have eyes, and you can rectify these mistakes for me."

"Very well, I understand. Our usual parts will be reversed. The pupil is to correct the master. The world is upside down, indeed !"

"Prepare the clay, chatterbox. Brigitte, my dear, help me to take off my coat and put on my blouse. What is Camille doing ? Where did you leave her ?"

"She is in her own room dressing. She will come down as soon as she is ready. If you have no further need of me I will join her again."

"How shy you are ! One would think you were afraid of meeting Madame de Carouge. Why this aversion to her ? She seems to me the most agreeable and unassuming of women."

"I don't know her, and I don't care to know her."

"But you know me, mademoiselle," said Carnac, "and I hope that I don't frighten you. I should deem it a very great favour if you would remain here a few moments longer."

"What has come over him ?" cried Gerfaut, amazed by this courteous language on the part of his pupil, who usually evinced very little desire for the elderly spinster's society.

"I have a favour to ask of your cousin."

"Of me?" asked Brigitte, rather scornfully.

"I would like a little information which you can certainly furnish, as you must be familiar with the materials of ladies' dresses."

"Undoubtedly; but I fail to understand——"

"Well, you see that dress lying there on the sofa; can you tell me what it is made of?"

"Of *gros-grain* silk, I should judge. But what of it?"

Carnac was about to reply when Gerfaut interrupted him by saying: "So you have taken to bringing dresses here—the cast-off dresses of the disreputable creatures whose society you frequent. I understand now why I haven't seen you for two days; I hoped by taking you to Madame Stenay's to give you a taste for better company; but you are incurable."

"I must go," said the prudish Brigitte, hurriedly.

"Mademoiselle, I again entreat you to remain," exclaimed Carnac, with an earnestness that made an evident impression upon the spinster cousin. And then, turning to Gerfaut, he continued: "I assure you, sir, upon my word of honour, that you are entirely mistaken. If I failed to come here as usual, it was because I had some very important matters to attend to; and my time has not been wasted, for I have been able to render some assistance in chasing the scoundrel who was the cause of your misfortune."

"What! has he been arrested?" exclaimed the sculptor.

"No; he is dead. The police tracked him to his home, and he tried to escape by the roof. I happened to be in the house at the time, and gave chase. I played with him for a time round a chimney, and while he was trying to get away from me his foot slipped, and he fell into the street below. He was instantly killed."

"He richly deserved his fate," remarked Brigitte.

"I am not inclined to waste any pity on him," said Gerfaut, "but he isn't the person whom I feel most bitter against. He helped in the murder; there is no doubt of that in my mind. Still, that is a matter for the police and the authorities to attend to. It doesn't concern me personally. The other wretch, the vile creature who destroyed my sight, is the one I should like to see arrested. These detectives are stupid creatures after all, for in spite of all the clues furnished them, they have accomplished nothing. They knew that the guilty woman was well off, for she wore a very rich silk dress. The commissary told me that they found a scrap of this dress in the door which she slammed in my face after throwing the vitriol at me. It is upon her that I should like to wreak my vengeance. Ah, if I had not been blind, I could have found her, I'm sure of it, and when I did I shouldn't have sent for the police to take her to prison."

"But you would have taken her there yourself, I suppose?"

"No, I should have given myself the satisfaction of strangling her with my own hands, after first tearing her eyes out."

As he spoke, Gerfaut trembled with anger, and his usually placid face assumed a really frightful expression. It was very evident that had the opportunity offered he would have done exactly what he threatened. "It isn't impossible that she may yet be captured," Carnac ventured to remark slowly.

"What do you mean?" asked Gerfaut.

"I have in my possession a letter written by her to the wretch who broke his neck."

"That is something, certainly. But I suppose she did not place her name and address at the end of the letter."

"It is signed Margot. That isn't sufficient, of course; but if we succeeded in identifying the handwriting——"

"You are mad."

"No, I am not. Here is the letter. My object in requesting Mademoiselle Brigitte to remain, was to ask her to read it to you, as you are unable to read it for yourself."

Brigitte at once took the folded paper which Gerfaut's pupil extended to her, and read:—"Adrien, my old pal and assistant, this is to inform you that everything is going on fine. I made my escape without any difficulty, and we are not likely to have any further trouble. The fool who returned to poke round about the alley saw nothing but blazes, for I burned his eyes out, as I said I would. You can rest easy now, and enjoy yourself with the money I will give you at the Elysée on Friday night. Come in costume, with the old set. We will meet at the corner of the Rue Houdon. Try to find snug quarters for yourself as soon as possible, where the police won't think of nabbing you."

"What a frightfully vulgar style!" murmured the ex-schoolmistress. "But strange as it may appear, I am almost sure that I have seen this handwriting before."

"You *have* seen it, mademoiselle. You saw it a minute ago, and it is in your power to see it again whenever you like. Take the trouble to examine the note which Monsieur Gerfaut handed me when he came in, and compare that writing with this."

"Why, the writing is exactly the same," cried Brigitte.

"Yes, there was evidently no attempt at disguise on the part of the writer; that is apparent. The only difference is in the signatures. The letter addressed to the accomplice is signed 'Margot;' the one addressed to Monsieur Gerfaut——"

"Is signed, 'Marguerite de Carouge,'" said Brigitte, unhesitatingly.

"Marguerite de Carouge!" exclaimed Gerfaut. "Impossible."

"You have just heard what Mademoiselle Brigitte says, sir," replied Carnac. "She declares that the two letters were written by the same hand. I certainly did not compel her to say so."

"You are leagued together to deceive me."

"Cousin," retorted Brigitte, "that is an imputation which I cannot tolerate. Permit me to retire—at least until your conversation with this young gentleman is over."

"Again I implore you to remain, mademoiselle," interposed Carnac. "Without your assistance I shall not succeed in convincing Monsieur Gerfaut. Besides, Mademoiselle Camille's happiness is at stake."

"There is no need whatever of dragging my daughter's name into the conversation. She has nothing to do with Madame de Carouge," said the sculptor. "Besides, calumnies are not proofs. Prove that the lady was the writer of the letter to that scoundrel if you can."

"Question Mademoiselle Brigitte, as you are unfortunately unable to compare the letter with the note you received yourself."

"The letter and the note were written by the same person, unquestionably," murmured the cousin.

"You know nothing at all about such matters," fumed Gerfaut. "There are persons who can imitate anybody's handwriting; and some one has probably imitated that of Madame de Carouge."

"But what could have been their object? The man named Plantin was not aware that you were acquainted with this vocalist, nor could he have known that she would write to you the next day. Madame de Carouge unquestionably leads two distinct lives. She is also known as Margot, and she acquired a fortune in Russia by the most dishonourable means; but though she is now posing as a paragon of virtue, she has not given up amusing herself. A few days before the concert given at Madame Stenay's I met her at the Elysée Montmartre ball, dancing furiously with a set of rowdies she had brought with her."

"Proofs, or I will turn you out of the house," roared Gerfaut.

"I have proofs in plenty," replied Carnac, quietly. "You have not forgotten Graindorge, the policeman who brought you home after the accident. Well, the day he last called on you, Madame de Carouge was in the studio, and he recognised her as the same person he had frequently met at public balls under the name of Margot with the scar. He told me so privately. I saw him again the same evening at the Elysée, where we both witnessed Margot's marvellous dancing; and this time he became satisfied beyond a doubt of the correctness of his suspicions."

"Bring him here at once. Let me see if he will dare to assert this in my presence, and in the presence of Madame de Carouge."

"He wouldn't hesitate to do so, I'm sure of it, but unfortunately he is dead."

"He, too! This, is, indeed, remarkable," said Gerfaut, ironically. "You have unearthed two witnesses against this lady, and they both disappear simultaneously."

"You are quite correct, inasmuch as poor Graindorge was hurled from the roof by Plantin, whom we were pursuing at the time, and who fell to the pavement himself only an instant afterwards. I am consequently unable to bring him into the presence of Madame de Carouge, but I can point out a peculiarity by which you can satisfy yourself beyond a doubt that she and Margot are one and the same person. Margot had a scar on her face from a wound inflicted by one of her lovers, who was rather too fond of handling his knife, and this scar is still visible on the cheek of the vocalist you so much admire."

"That is false; Camille would have noticed it."

"The scar is no longer very distinct; besides, she conceals it by the skilful use of paint and powder; but it exists all the same, and you have a very easy way of convincing yourself on the point, as she is willing to allow you to feel her face with your fingers. Feel for the furrow in the flesh, and you'll find it. I will guarantee that."

"You forget that if Madame de Carouge was desirous of concealing this scar from me, or if she had any interest in doing so, she would not allow me to touch her face."

"She is anxious to ingratiate herself into your favour, and you have expressed a strong desire to model a bust of her; besides, she doesn't know that you are aware of the accident that befel Margot, as she has no idea that you have ever heard Margot even spoken of. Try the experiment, sir, I entreat you."

"I will," replied Gerfaut, after a short pause, "but I am sure that I shall find nothing; and if I don't, I give you fair warning that you must seek another employer, for I will never allow you to set foot in my studio again."

"Very well, sir. I accept the conditions. Only try the experiment. That is all I ask. The result will be conclusive."

"No, it will not. If Madame de Carouge had done what you say she would never have come to my house, or at least, having once come, she would never have repeated her visit, for on the occasion of her first call she heard all that Graindorge had to say about my unfortunate adventure. She would have avoided me, instead of seeking me out."

"She has her reasons for frequenting your house," remarked Carnac, without entering into any further explanation. "But if the letter Mademoiselle Brigitte just read to you is not enough to convince you, I have something else to show you." As he spoke, he drew from his pocket another piece of paper, which he also handed to the cousin. "I am abusing your kindness, mademoiselle," he said, deferentially, "but I hope that you won't refuse to read these few lines aloud."

The spinster cousin needed no urging. She was beginning to cordially hate and distrust the beautiful woman whom she had always instinctively disliked without ever having seen her. "Ah!" she remarked, "this is in the same handwriting, but it is not a letter." And she read: "'Received of Madame Langoumois, the sum of two hundred francs as payment in full for two silk dresses sold to her.' This receipt is signed, 'Marguerite de Carouge,' like the note to my cousin."

"And what of that?" exclaimed Gerfaut, impatiently. "Hasn't Madame de Carouge a perfect right to sell her dresses when she gets tired of them? And who, pray, is this Madame Langoumois?"

"Madame Langoumois, sir, is a dealer in second-hand clothes, whom I have known for a long time, and who was also well acquainted with Margot, several years ago. Knowing this to be the case, I took advantage of the circumstance to satisfy myself that Margot had really assumed the name of Madame de Carouge. I requested Madame Langoumois to call at this lady's house in the Rue d'Anjou. She was not to say a word about me, of course; but in case she recognised her old customer Margot, in Madame de Carouge, she was to try to procure for me a few lines in her handwriting. I already had the letter addressed to Plantin in my possession, and I wished to procure one to compare with it."

"No detective could have done better. I should never have believed it was in you. Well, what was the result?"

"The result was that Madame Langoumois threw herself into the arms of Madame de Carouge, who seemed quite willing to renew her acquaintance with the obliging person to whom she had more than once had recourse in years gone by. And Madame Langoumois will corroborate my statements at any time. She is not dead. She lives in the Rue des Martyrs, and her shop is on the Boulevard Rochechouart. She must be either at home or at her shop now. Shall I go for her? You are expecting Madame de Carouge at any moment. If they should meet here, you would witness a strange and edifying scene."

Gerfaut's face was growing more and more gloomy. His pupil's statements were evidently beginning to make an impression on his mind. "No," he said, at last. "I will have no scenes in my daughter's house. But if I should become convinced of this woman's guilt——"

"And you will be convinced of it," interrupted Carnac. "You reminded me a few moments ago, that on entering the alley where the infamous creature who blinded you secreted herself, the commissary of police found a scrap of silk in the door. Well, I will ask Mademoiselle Brigitte to have the kindness to examine the dress I laid on that sofa."

Brigitte complied with his request, and as she unfolded the dress, she remarked : " A piece of the silk has evidently been torn away."

" Well, sir," said Carnac, turning to his employer, " this dress is one of the two garments sold to Madame Langoumois this morning by Madame de Carouge. You can doubt no longer. You have just heard the receipt read."

" So," murmured the indignant and horror-stricken Brigitte, " it was this woman who threw the vitriol in your eyes, and yet you have admitted her into your house, and allowed your daughter to become intimate with her ! " Gerfaut, pale as death, trembled with anger—an anger which he forced himself to restrain, but which seemed likely to burst forth all the more terribly. " You will deliver her up to justice, of course," continued his cousin, eagerly.

" For all Paris to know that I have received her at my house ! for my name to be dragged into the criminal courts ! Never ! "

" Are you willing, then, that her crimes shall go unpunished ? Allow me to say that such clemency on your part would be folly—worse than folly. I certainly hope that she will never be allowed to set foot in this house again. You say nothing. I understand ; and as I am resolved not to be brought even into momentary contact with such a vile creature, I will leave you."

" Go," replied Gerfaut, quietly ; " but do me the favour not to leave my daughter until I come upstairs, and don't make the slightest allusion to what you have just heard." Then as soon as the sculptor found himself alone with his pupil, he said, excitedly : " I have changed my mind. This matter must be ended here and now. Fetch Madame Langoumois at once."

" Ah, sir, you no longer doubt ? " exclaimed Carnac. " Yes, I will go for her immediately."

" Go, then, what are you waiting for ? This vile creature may arrive at any moment, and the sitting cannot be long, for the days are very short now ; but I don't want her to leave before I have confronted her with—"

The opening of a door interrupted the sentence, and the melodious voice of Marguerite de Carouge asked, gently : " May I come in ? " She entered, without waiting for the permission which she had asked only for form's sake, and advanced towards them with her head proudly erect, and a smile upon her lips, more beautiful and haughty than ever. Her toilet was superb ; in a word, she was armed and equipped for conquest. She frowned almost imperceptibly on catching sight of Carnac, still she nevertheless favoured him with a patronising smile, and then went straight towards Gerfaut, who had risen to his feet and was leaning upon a cane, having been obliged to employ this means of support since he had lost his sight. " Excuse me, my dear sir," she said, taking his hand, " I ought to have waited to be announced, instead of venturing to take you by surprise. I thought at first of going up to see Mademoiselle Gerfaut for a moment, but seeing the door of your studio open, I could not resist the temptation of saying good-day as I passed."

" You were quite right," said Camille's father, almost brusquely. " The days are very short at this season of the year, and a first sitting is necessarily a long one. We ought to begin immediately."

" Nothing would please me better, providing you will allow me ten minutes to rest and embrace your charming daughter."

" My daughter is not yet dressed."

" Oh, both of us being ladies, that makes no difference. Besides, I

have just copied a Russian air which she admired very much the other day, and I want to take it to her."

"You can give it to her presently, while my pupil goes out to procure a tool I find missing. In the meantime, I am anxious to gain some idea of your features, which I am unfortunately unable to see. Sit down, I beg."

"With pleasure. I am quite at your service, as you probably know, for I wrote to you to that effect, and I suppose you received my letter."

"I received it only a few moments ago. Carnac, show madame what attitude to assume."

"Instruction on that point will be very welcome, I assure you; for never having sat, even for a portrait, I am altogether inexperienced."

"It is a very simple matter, madame," replied Carnac. "You can move as often as you please. We are not as exacting, in that respect, as photographers. Just assume an easy and natural position. Sit well back in your chair, with one hand resting on the arm of the chair, the face turned about three-quarters round, and the chin slightly raised."

"Must I remove my hat?"

"Not yet," replied Gerfaut. "A preliminary examination of the features is all that is necessary now. I will devote some attention to the hair to-morrow. To-day I shall only try to get a general idea of the features."

"You can hardly imagine how anxious I am to see you begin work. If you succeed, under such apparently insurmountable difficulties, it will be the greatest triumph of your genius, and I am delighted to assist in this most interesting experiment."

Gerfaut, being guided by his pupil, now slowly approached, and, without laying aside his cane, which he had transferred to his left hand, began to pass the fingers of his right hand slowly over the features of Madame de Carouge, who ever and anon started and uttered a little nervous cry.

"Do I hurt you?" asked the sculptor, almost sternly.

"Not at all, only I am terribly ticklish. Well, what do you think of my nose? You must have discovered that it is not of the Grecian type, by any means.

"It has all the more character on that account, and I am sure, now, that I shall be able to reproduce it accurately; the forehead has some very marked depressions; the lips are full; the ear is remarkably small and well formed; the cheeks are plump, without being heavy. I shall catch the resemblance, I am very sure; the more so from the fact, madame, that you have one distinctive peculiarity which I shall not overlook when I begin modelling. I can feel here, beneath my fingers, a decided furrow, or depression; a scar, no doubt."

"It is the result of a fall in my infancy. The scar was very apparent in former years, but I flatter myself that it is almost imperceptible now, and it seems to me quite unnecessary to indicate it in my bust. It does not disfigure me, does it, sir?" added Madame de Carouge, turning to Carnac.

This unexpected question rather embarrassed the student of nature, who was earnestly watching his master's face, and anxiously asking himself how this strange scene would end; however, he boldly replied: "I assure you, madame, that I never for a moment suspected the existence of the scar you speak of."

"In that case, Monsieur Gerfaut can certainly omit it without laying himself open to the charge of having flattered me," rejoined the lady,

eagerly. "Is your examination ended, sir?" she continued, turning to the sculptor.

"Entirely. Carnac will now prepare the clay for me, and run to the studio of a friend to whom he has lent one of his tools. If you wish to see my daughter, now is your time."

"Certainly I wish to see her, and I am also anxious for her to be present at the sitting, which will begin, I suppose, as soon as my visit upstairs is ended."

"No, I cannot consent to that. Camille's presence would disturb me, and divert my attention from my work; besides, the sight of my trying to work in such a fashion would remind her of my misfortune, and I want to spare her any pain as much as possible. I wish her to remain away, and I beg that you will inform her so. I particularly desire that you should return alone. Carnac will not be gone for more than a quarter of an hour."

"As you please, sir," replied Madame de Carouge, glancing first at the master and then at the pupil.

The sculptor could not see her; but it was very evident to Carnac that she had become suspicious since Gerfaut had discovered the scar. "The governor doesn't know how shrewd she is," the young fellow thought. "He has said too much, and I shouldn't be surprised if she slipped through his fingers after all. It would be no great misfortune if she disappeared. It would certainly be quite a relief to be rid of her."

Madame de Carouge seemed to be in no haste to go up to Mademoiselle Gerfaut's room. On the contrary, she walked leisurely about the studio, examining the tapestries that adorned the walls, and the numerous works of art. Finally, her eyes turned to the sofa upon which the torn dress was lying. She perceived it, and recognised it, unquestionably, for she changed countenance; but she did not lose her self-control, and, instead of making any exclamation or asking any question she contented herself with giving a searching glance at Carnac, who did not sustain her scrutiny very composedly. "She sees through our little game!" he thought, "and we shall not catch her after all. It is my fault. I might have known that she would discover the truth if she had five minutes' conversation with Gerfaut."

"I may make use of the private staircase, may I not, my dear sir?" Madame de Carouge at last inquired quietly. "It leads straight to Mademoiselle Camille's apartments, I believe?"

"Pass out through the door at the end of the studio, madame. I will accompany you to the staircase. Your arm, Carnac."

Carnac hastened forward to render the required aid, and they all three reached the door at the same time. "Pray go no further, sir," said Madame de Carouge. "I can easily find my way alone."

"If necessary, my daughter's maid will indicate it. You will find her on the floor above."

"Very well; I will remember your injunctions, and not stop long with Mademoiselle Camille. And I will return alone, as you bade me."

With this promise, she opened the door and vanished from their sight. Gerfaut, left alone with Carnac, laid his hand upon his pupil's shoulder, and said, imperiously: "Go at once."

"You wish me to fetch Madame Langoumois, I suppose, sir, but I am sure that it will be useless, for Margot will simply deny the charge and decamp. You will hear nothing more about her. Is that what you desire?"

"No; but go."

"Then you have decided to send for a commissary of police and hand Madame de Carouge over to his custody? Where will you have her arrested—in your studio or in Mademoiselle Camille's room?"

"Neither there nor here. But go, I tell you."

"He has certainly lost his senses," thought Carnac; "and if I don't interfere, he will surely commit some act of folly."

"Will you go?" roared Gerfaut, no longer able to restrain his rage.

"I am going, sir; but I am certain that Margot's suspicions have been aroused, and I should not be surprised if she took advantage of my absence to make her escape."

"That must be prevented. Lock the front door on the outside, and put the key in your pocket. Lock the door leading from this room into the hall as well, and take that key with you, so that the woman cannot make her escape in that direction."

"Very well, sir; it shall be done, and I will confront her with Madame Langoumois as soon as possible. But first, let me assist you to your arm-chair."

"No; I have my cane. I can do very well alone. Go, go, I tell you once more!"

Carnac dared insist no further. He felt that every second was precious. Gerfaut, standing silent and motionless, heard him leave the room, and listened for the sound of the key turning in the lock; then: "I am going to kill her!" he muttered, savagely, grinding his teeth together. Leaning against the wall beside the door leading to the staircase, and upon the side against which it opened, he lifted the cane which served as his guide when he was alone, and drew from it a short sword as sharp and as pointed as a stiletto. Then, with his arm upraised, he waited ready to strike.

Gerfaut was a singular person, one of a distinct type; in fact, a character—something infinitely more rare. He was naturally violent, almost coarse in disposition. Parisian life, and, above all, the influence of an adored wife, had softened, disciplined, and refined him to a great extent; but in heart he was still much the same man, obstinate, excitable, and credulous. He bestowed his confidence blindly, and unbosomed himself to the first person he happened to meet; but when he discovered that he had been deceived, the reaction was terrible. He had believed implicitly in Madame de Carouge. He still believed in Philippe de Charny. But he had just learned that the vocalist was one of the vilest of wretches; and he forgot everything else in his desire to wreak vengeance upon the creature who had destroyed his sight. The police, justice, the laws—he had nothing to do with them! He was determined to avenge himself by his own hand. He had tried Margot, he had condemned her, and he felt irresistibly impelled to punish her himself. No fear of scandal could deter him now. He did not give a thought to the inevitable consequences of the deed he was about to commit. His daughter was forgotten. Provided he could kill Margot, it mattered not to him if he were tried by twelve men, chosen from among his fellow-citizens, who not unfrequently avail themselves of extenuating circumstances to spare criminals, but who do not always show equal indulgence to more deserving prisoners; and this resolution once made, he proceeded to carry it into execution with indomitable energy.

To succeed in his plan, he must be alone. A witness would interfere, and check his arm. It was also necessary for his victim to come of her

own accord within his reach, for a blind man cannot pursue an enemy who is endowed with sight. For these reasons he had begun by sending Carnac away on a plausible pretext, and had then stationed himself near the door leading to the inner staircase, knowing that Margot could only enter the studio in that direction, as Carnac had taken away the key of the door leading into the hall. He had also cautioned Madame de Carouge not to remain long with Camille, and not to bring his daughter back with her; and now, with his left hand touching the door, in order that he might be warned in advance of its opening, and the sword tightly clenched in his right hand, he waited, as motionless as the statue of an avenging Nemesis.

If Carnac, who was hastening with all possible speed to the Boulevard de Clichy, could have seen his dear master in this threatening attitude, he would have rushed back to avert a catastrophe the disastrous consequences of which he would have fully realised. But he was now looking forward with delight to the scene between Margot and Madame Langoumois, for he entertained strong hopes of being able to extort from the former, in Gerfaut's presence, an acknowledgment of her intimacy, and perhaps complicity, with the Count de Charny.

So Gerfaut waited. No compunctions of conscience visited his heart or unnerved his arm. He stood there at least twenty minutes before any sound warned him of the approach of his intended victim. Daylight was beginning to wane, and the silent studio was becoming dark, but at last the blind man heard a light step on the other side of the door. A woman was leisurely descending the stairs. "It is she!" he murmured. "The wretch is coming to meet her death!"

A few seconds afterwards the door opened gently. Gerfaut stepped aside, to give Margot time to come within his reach; then with his left hand seizing hold, first of a silk-clad shoulder, and then of a bare throat, upon which his fingers closed with a vice-like pressure, so as to prevent any outcry from his victim, with his right he struck the shrinking woman full in the breast. The blow was so violent that, as soon as he relaxed his hold, his victim fell at his feet without uttering a moan. He could not repress a shudder on coming in contact with the lifeless body, and suddenly threw his blood-stained weapon aside with a cry of horror. He seemed to have suddenly been aroused from a troubled sleep by a frightful nightmare. His reason had returned to him, and he realised what he had done. He had committed murder in a paroxysm of fury, without knowing what he was doing, impelled to the deed by a power stronger than his own will. Seized with a sudden horror of himself, he stood there, not daring either to move or call out. Fear held him both silent and motionless. "I am an assassin!" he finally muttered, shuddering. "Yes, an assassin; for I prepared this trap, and waited for her here behind the door, then struck her down without giving her an opportunity to arouse my pity or to defend herself. I believe she was guilty, and yet who knows but that I may have been mistaken? Carnac gave me what he considered conclusive proofs of her guilt, but did I take time to investigate them? What if she be really innocent, and if Carnac has deceived me, or has himself been deceived by appearances! In that case, I should be the guiltiest of men, and there would be nothing left for me but to kill myself, to spare Camille the disgrace of having a father in the dock! Even then, my death would not save her from dishonour, for people would learn what had occurred here, and she would henceforth be

known as the daughter of an assassin. Ah! curses upon the man who excited my wrath against this unfortunate woman!"

Gerfaut had been obliged to lean against the wall to sustain his tottering limbs. He fancied he could detect the smell of fresh blood, and he longed to escape from this close contact with the lifeless body at his feet, but he dared not move, for fear of stumbling over it. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" he repeated, overcome with consternation and remorse. "Carnac will soon return with that woman to find me here beside the creature I have killed. Carnac would keep my secret, but his companion will reveal everything. She will send for the police to come and arrest me here, under my daughter's very eyes. How shall I get rid of this body? I cannot even fly away from it, for I am blind! Shall I call any one? No, never! Camille would come. She would die of terror at seeing me in such a position. I must be covered with blood. Can I have gone mad? No. I can think and reason calmly, and even if I am mad, no one will believe it. They will say I am feigning madness to save my life." Then he muttered between his set teeth: "Oh, my head, my head! I cannot endure this any longer! I'll dash my brains out against the wall!" He would have done so, perhaps, had not a new idea suddenly flashed upon his troubled brain. "What if the woman should not be dead? I struck with all my might, but the point of the sword may have slipped aside, or penetrated the breast without touching the heart. It may be that she only fainted, and shall I allow her to remain here without medical aid, when a physician might perhaps restore her to life? Ah! I should be a monster if I did not try to save her!"

He knelt down beside the body, and placed his hand upon it to satisfy himself that life was not entirely extinct. Was it only fancy, or did he really detect some warmth through the dress of his victim, when his hand happened to touch her shoulder? "Where did I wound her?" he murmured. "I cannot remember. Oh, yes, it was in the breast. I seized her by the throat, and she was facing me. The blade may have glanced aside on coming in contact with her stays."

Suddenly he uttered a cry of terror as he hastily lifted his hand, dripping with blood. "I can endure this suspense no longer," he cried. "I must try to get to the stairs and call Brigitte. She will do what I dare not do."

He tried to get upon his feet, but in endeavouring to steady himself by means of his left hand, his fingers grazed the woman's face, and he felt her breath upon them. "She still breathes!" he exclaimed. "It is the death struggle, perhaps, but life is not extinct." Emboldened by this discovery, Gerfaut tried to lift the recumbent head, and as he did so, he almost unconsciously passed his hand over the injured woman's face. "It is strange," he thought, "but I do not recognise these features, though I felt them so carefully half an hour ago. I am mistaken, of course, as the scar will speedily prove." But scarcely a second later, he exclaimed: "The scar is not here. This is not Madame de Carouge. Oh, my God, whom, then, have I killed?"

Frozen with horror by this discovery Gerfaut remained bending over the body which he no longer dared to touch, and which he could not see. He no longer had the strength to rise, or the courage to call for assistance. He longed to die; and had the weapon, which he had hurled across the studio a few minutes before, been within his reach, he would have plunged it into his heart. "I am mistaken, I must be mistaken," he murmured,

trying to re-assure himself. "It can't be any one but that woman. She, alone, could have come in by this door. Brigitte declared when she left the room, that she would not come back again, and I expressly forbade her to allow Camille to come down. I did not search carefully; the scar must be there, I will find it! I must find it!"

Again he extended his hand, and this time it came in contact with the head of his victim, and with rich masses of soft, wavy hair, disordered by the woman's fall. "It is not she," he said in a hollow voice. "She had a hat on. I recollect that she asked me if she should take it off, and I replied that it wasn't necessary. And these curls, it seems to me this is not the first time I have touched them. The tresses are as soft as silk, and they twine around my fingers like those of—My God! if it should be——"

Just then, the sound of a key, turning in a lock, made him start. Some one was opening the outside door. "It is Carnac, returning with the second-hand clothes dealer," thought Gerfaut. "I am lost! but he will at least tell me whom I have killed."

It was indeed Carnac, but alone. "I have not been able to find Madame Langoumois," he remarked on entering. "She was not at home nor at her shop, and knowing that you were waiting for me, I——" He suddenly paused, in the midst of his explanation, for he had just perceived his master bending over the form of a woman who was lying apparently lifeless upon the floor of the studio. "Good heavens! what has happened!" he exclaimed, rushing forward. But he had scarcely reached Gerfaut, when he added: "What, Mademoiselle Camille covered with blood! wounded, dead, perhaps!"

"Camille! Did you say Camille?" faltered the wretched father.

"Yes," stammered Carnac. "What has happened?"

"I have killed my daughter," sobbed Gerfaut. "I intended to kill that vile creature whose guilt I had just discovered. I was watching for her return—I heard a woman come in—I struck at her——"

"And it was your daughter who received the blow. Pray heaven, it may not prove fatal! Stand aside, and let me get to her," said Carnac, darting past the sculptor, and pushing him impatiently out of the way. "She is wounded in the breast," he said, as he threw himself on his knees beside the prostrate girl. "The wound looks very serious, but it has bled freely, and that is a good sign. The heart still beats; all hope is not lost."

"She lives!" cried Gerfaut. "Ah, I do not deserve the mercy God has shown me! Run for a physician."

"In one moment!" replied Carnac, who had not lost his head. "Your daughter cannot remain here on the floor. Assist me, first, in carrying her to her bed. No, I forgot that you can't see, and that you would be a hindrance rather than a help to me. I can take her upstairs unaided, if you will only go ahead and open the doors for me."

Gerfaut was in no condition to argue, so throwing the door, which Camille had not had time to close before her fall, wide open, he managed to stagger upstairs by clinging to the bannisters. Carnac followed with the apparently lifeless form of the young girl in his arms. On the landing, they met Rose, who uttered a cry of terror on perceiving the lugubrious cortège. "Mademoiselle has just had a severe fall, and is unconscious," said Carnac, quickly. "She will soon be all right, however. Where is Mademoiselle Brigitte?"

"In her own room, sir."

"Well, ask her to come down at once; then go to the ante-room, and don't leave it for a moment. If any one calls, you must say that your master has gone out with his daughter, and that they will be at home to nobody to-day."

Rose obeyed like a person in a dream.

After placing the still unconscious girl on the bed with the tenderest care, Carnac laid his hand on his master's arm, and said: "You are not anxious to go to prison, I suppose."

"I want to save Camille!" exclaimed Gerfaut. "Everything else matters little or nothing."

"If you will consent to be guided by me, we will save her, and no one shall know that you nearly killed her." And as Brigitte rushed into the room just then, in a state of abject terror, Carnac turned to her and said: "Mademoiselle, control yourself, I beg of you. No cries, no noise, and not a word to the servants. Monsieur Gerfaut wounded his daughter, mistaking her for another person. She is dangerously injured, but I think she will recover. One of my friends, a physician, accompanied me to the door of this house a few moments ago, and I know where to find him. I will have him here in ten minutes. I will be responsible for his discretion, and I depend upon you to prevent any one else from learning the truth. Every one must believe it to be the result of an accident. Madame de Carouge has left the house, has she not?"

"Madame de Carouge! I did not even know that she had been here."

"You have not seen anything of her, then?"

"No, nor has Camille, who has been with me until a moment ago, when she went down stairs, in spite of my protests."

"Very well, I must go now; but I will be back in a few moments. Calm Monsieur Gerfaut, and try to preserve your own self-control." This advice was not unnecessary, for the spinster cousin was beginning to sob, and Gerfaut was bending over his daughter, loudly deploring his rash act and its consequences.

"How fortunate it was that I happened to fall in with my old friend Buzançais just now," Carnac said to himself, as he flew down the stairs three steps at a time. "He is a very clever physician and surgeon, although he has little or no practice, and he will hold his tongue if I ask him to, whereas any other medical man would, no doubt, go and report the case to a commissary of police. Heaven grant that he hasn't finished his beer yet! But there is little danger of that. He likes to sip it leisurely, and is rarely content with less than three glasses."

Carnac was right. His friend was still sitting in front of the door of a small café on the Boulevard des Batignolles, not a hundred yards from Gerfaut's residence. "Here, waiter!" cried Carnac, throwing a franc on the table at which his friend was seated, "pay this gentleman's score, and keep the change for yourself. Come, Esculapius," he continued, addressing the physician, "I have found a patient for you. If you cure her, your fortune is made."

"What is the malady?" asked the doctor, springing eagerly to his feet. "Pleurisy, quinsy?"

"She has been dangerously wounded in the breast by a sword. It was done by her own father, who mistook her for another person."

"He must be terribly near-sighted."

"He is blind. It is Tiburce Gerfaut, my employer. You must understand, of course, that if you mentioned the affair to outsiders, Gerfaut

would be accused of attempting to murder his daughter; and the consequences might be very serious."

"I will be as silent as the grave; and in being silent, I shall only do my duty. Professional secrecy is obligatory, my dear fellow. As for the cure, I can only answer for that after I have seen the patient. Did the wound bleed freely?"

"Profusely."

"Then there is hope, but when the hæmorrhage is internal there is no chance whatever."

"If the girl recovers will her convalescence be long?" asked Carnac.

"Two or three months—according to circumstances."

"Good, then the marriage is off. The count is beaten."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing. Here we are. Come in, they are expecting us," said the young sculptor, pulling his friend into the hall.

## VIII.

NINE days have elapsed since Camille Gerfaut fell under her father's sword, and Dr. Buzançais has not yet pronounced her convalescent. He has never once left her for forty-eight hours since the misfortune, and he still spends every other night in the sick-room. Carnac and Brigitte take his place when he is compelled to seek repose. Gerfaut never leaves the room, but sits near the bed, the image of helpless and gloomy despair, listening to the faint breathing of the injured girl, and waiting in vain for some word of recognition or forgiveness. Buzançais has positively forbidden Camille to utter a single word, so she expresses herself only by signs; and these signs her father cannot see. No visitors have been allowed to set foot in the house since the catastrophe. The two servant-maids are devoted to the family, and Carnac has taught them their lesson well. All callers are informed that Mademoiselle Gerfaut has been the victim of a very serious accident—a fall from the top of some steps in her father's studio, which she had mounted for the purpose of hanging a picture—and her physicians, convinced that the slightest excitement would prove fatal, have absolutely forbidden the admission of visitors.

It is quite evident that M. de Charny does not yet consider himself defeated, for he comes every day to inquire after his betrothed. Rose, who does not like him, receives him in anything but a cordial manner. He has written to Gerfaut, but Gerfaut cannot read now, and it is Brigitte who opens the letter, and allows it to remain unanswered after consulting Carnac, whom she has learned to esteem. M. de Charny must thus naturally suppose that his prospective father-in-law's feelings have changed towards him, but he does not seem to be in the least discouraged. He believes, or pretends to believe, that the marriage is only postponed. Marcel and his sister also call to inquire after the patient every day; and Carnac re-assures them, and promises that Camille will see them as soon as she becomes convalescent. Jeanne Plantin, moreover, has called several times. On each occasion Carnac has gone down to speak to her, and to pay her liberally for the work she brings. He has informed her that she is a widow; and he has wrung from her a promise that she will tell a commissary of police all she knows about her unworthy husband's past at some future day.

Madame de Carouge, in short, is the only person who has given no signs of life, and Carnac often wonders if she has any suspicions of the terrible drama in which she so narrowly escaped playing the part of victim. However, his duties as assistant nurse occupy him to such an extent that he has not even been able to call on Madame Langoumois to procure some information. He sees notices posted about, promising three hundred francs' reward to any person who will return a gentleman's amethyst ring, bearing a coat of arms. But he is quite sure that no one has returned it, as the ring is still in his pocket. He is in no hurry to make use of this article of conviction. It is merely a weapon which he retains in case the count should return to the charge; but, under present circumstances, M. de Charny seems anything but formidable, and Margot appears to be vanquished.

However, the ninth day had dawned, and Dr. Buzançais had just arrived. Gerfaut, Brigitte, and Carnac were awaiting him in the sick-room. His manner was more serious than usual, and none of the party ventured to address him. He went straight to Camille's bedside and proceeded to examine her chest. The decisive moment had evidently come, and in a few moments they would hear the final verdict—one from which there would be no appeal. "Draw a long breath," said the doctor. "Another; still another. Now cough a little."

Camille obeyed the doctor's directions implicitly, and showed no signs of either fatigue or anxiety. But the suspense of the spectators was terrible. They dared not even breathe. At last Buzançais laid Camille's head gently back upon the pillow, straightened himself up, passed his fingers through his shaggy locks—a trick of his—and said in the sepulchral voice he unconsciously assumed on grave occasions: "Mademoiselle, have you plenty of courage?" Gerfaut turned as pale as death, and tried to rise from his chair. "I ask you this, mademoiselle," continued Buzançais, "because, although I am sure that you are very comfortable in bed, it is now necessary for you to leave it."

"What!" the entire party exclaimed in chorus.

"Mademoiselle is cured," said the doctor, quietly. "The right lung, which was injured, is now performing its functions normally, and no further danger is to be apprehended. You see what it is to be young, and to have pure blood. I could do nothing here; nature has done it all."

"Can you solemnly assure me that she will live?" cried Gerfaut.

"Live! Why, she will be driving in the Champs-Élysées in less than a fortnight! The main thing is for mademoiselle to avoid fatigue in the early stage of her convalescence. But I give her permission to get up to-day; I even advise it."

This time Gerfaut sprang to his feet, and nearly smothered Buzançais in his close embrace. "Twenty thousand francs! one hundred thousand francs! all I possess is yours!" he cried.

"Pardon me, my dear sir, but you seem to have very little knowledge of arithmetic," said the doctor, laughing. "Ten visits at five francs a visit amount to fifty francs. Add to this, if you choose, another hundred francs for the nights spent here, and our account is settled."

"Take this, I beg," pleaded Gerfaut. And such was his persistence that he finally managed to slip into the doctor's pocket a small purse which he had drawn from his own.

At this moment Camille asked him, in a weak voice: "Will you allow me to speak now?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, on condition you don't talk too much."

"I can at least tell you that I owe my life to you, and that I shall never forget it," said the girl gently, offering him her hand.

The doctor ventured to kiss her delicate fingers, and replied: "I hope that you will have no further use of me as a physician, but if you want Jacques Buzançais as a friend he is at your service."

Camille smilingly motioned him aside, and said: "Father, come and kiss me. The doctor does not forbid it."

Gerfaut bent over her, sobbing. "You forgive me, then?" he murmured.

"Hush, hush!" replied the girl, in a whisper.

"All violent emotion is positively forbidden," cried Buzançais.

"Yes, father, sit down," insisted Camille, "and do me the favour to answer my questions. I have a host to put to you. In the first place, tell me about our friends. None of them have been allowed to see me."

"I have only carried out the doctor's orders," stammered Gerfaut.

"But you certainly can tell me whether they displayed any solicitude or not. I am sure that Monsieur de Charny has been here."

"Here it comes!" thought Carnac. "She is cured of her wound, but not of her infatuation for that scoundrel."

"Monsieur de Charny has called several times," replied Gerfaut, with some embarrassment. "In fact, I think he has been here almost every day."

"I was sure of it," sighed Camille; "and yet you did not admit him. What was he told?"

"That you had had a bad fall, which might prove fatal in its consequences, for you nearly died, my poor child."

"But Monsieur Buzançais promised me that I should live, and I am so much better now that I can see my friends without danger."

The physician glanced at Carnac before replying, and read in his eyes the response he was to make. "Mademoiselle," he said, "you are on the road to recovery, but you must be reasonable. The slightest agitation may cause a relapse. Before resuming your former habits, wait until you are completely restored to health. That won't be long."

"But, doctor, what difference does it make if I talk to my father or to another person?"

"No difference, providing the person is indifferent to you. Is that the case?"

Camille blushed, as she archly replied: "If that were the case, I should not be so anxious to see the person."

"Then I absolutely forbid the interview. All emotion is prohibited until further notice."

"I submit, then," replied Camille, gently.

"I expected no less from a person of your good sense; and now, mademoiselle, I must go, but I will call again to-morrow to see how you are. I only warn you that if you are guilty of any imprudence I shall not fail to discover it at my next visit."

"And if you have no further need of me I will take a turn on the boulevard with my friend," said Carnac.

"Go, my boy, and stay as long as you please," replied Gerfaut. "This must be a *fête* day for every one."

The student of nature required no urging, and he and the doctor left the house together. "You are well pleased," remarked Buzançais, "and they

are well pleased, but I am certainly the best pleased of all ; for if the girl had died I should have found myself in a very unpleasant predicament."

"Why?"

"Because the physician whose duty it is to issue certificates of death would have reported that the deceased had died from an injury inflicted by some sharp instrument which had entered the chest and pierced the upper lobe of the right lung. The authorities would have insisted upon knowing who inflicted the wound. They would have discovered that it was Gerfaut, and I should have been hauled over the coals for having failed to inform the proper persons of the facts. So I have even more reason to rejoice at the girl's recovery than you have. Now, if the members of the household are careful the real facts of the case will never be noised about."

"I hope not, I am sure. Well, you are comparatively rich now, old fellow."

"True, the father offered to shower gold upon me. Wait a moment, and let me see what he did thrust into my pocket. Look, a thousand-franc note. It is too much, ten times too much. He must be insane."

"No, he is a millionaire, and he adores his daughter. He will give you even more when the cure is complete."

"I shall not take another penny. I have no idea what to do with this."

"You had better buy yourself a black coat and some office furniture. And now that you have cured Camille, if you could only assist me in curing a certain Count de Charny——"

"Charny ! It seems to me I have heard that name before."

"Gerfaut and his daughter both mentioned it in your presence."

"I recollect that, and understanding from your grimaces that you wished the gentleman to be kept out of the way, I issued my orders accordingly. Who is this man ? The girl's lover ?"

"Yes, she is betrothed to him."

"But you don't expect to prevent her from marrying?"

"I mean to try it."

"Monsieur Gerfaut does not seem to oppose the match, so what are your objections ? He almost apologised for not having admitted the gentleman. Why on earth do you wish to break off the match?"

"Because I have every reason to believe that this handsome Charny is an unprincipled rascal, in spite of his title and pretensions. I strongly suspect him of being the lover and accomplice of the very woman Gerfaut was trying to kill when he wounded Camille: Margot threw the vitriol at Gerfaut, I am sure of that as I can be of anything ; but she did not hang the Bracieux woman, at least without assistance."

"You are speaking of the affair of the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts, I suppose ? I recollect noticing an account of it in some newspaper, but I seldom pay any attention to such cases. Who was the victim?"

"A poor wretch who had impoverished herself for a handsome fellow she was mad about, and who was then reduced to singing in the streets to keep herself from starving."

"How strange !" muttered Buzançais. "Two years ago when I resided in the Rue Norvins at Montmartre, I used to meet a beggar woman who was probably the very person you allude to."

"Fertugue also used to meet her—you know Fertugue, the portrait painter?—but he could not tell me much about her."

"I noticed her more particularly because I was almost sure that I had

seen her in much better circumstances three or four years before. Was any one able to tell you her name?"

"Her name was Marie Bracieux."

"Marie Bracieux!" repeated Buzançais, tapping his forehead as if to arouse his dormant memory. "It seems to me that it is the very same name, but I am not sure. The strangest thing is that each of the names I have heard mentioned this morning awakes some confused recollection in my mind. What is the Christian name of that Count de Charny you spoke of?"

"Philippe."

"I have it now. I know to whom you refer. What a strange faculty memory is! Here I have been puzzling my brain ten minutes or more to recall something, and the mere mention of a name brings it all back to me. But in order that I may be quite sure, describe this count to me. He is a tall, light-haired fellow, is he not, rather slender, and decidedly distinguished looking?"

"Yes. Where did you meet him, and when?"

"I will tell you the whole story; but I am dying of thirst. Suppose we stop and get a glass of beer?"

The two friends were soon seated outside a café, with a large glass pitcher of beer before them. Buzançais poured out a glassful, emptied it at a draught, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and thus began: "My dear fellow, the story I am about to relate to you is not in the least degree sensational or startling, but my account will certainly have the merit of truthfulness. About six years ago, immediately after I received my diploma, I went to live in the Rue Germain-Pilon, and I took my meals at a dirty restaurant on the Place Pigalle. All I needed was some patients to expend my knowledge upon, and money to support me. The restaurant——"

"I know that. Go on," interrupted Carnac.

"You will become a great sculptor, perhaps, but you will never be a good listener. What I intended to say was that occasionally I met a strange creature there—this very Marie Bracieux of whom you speak. Although her clothing was worn and soiled, it was of the richest texture, and she herself had unquestionably seen better days. I had several conversations with her, and discovered that she was as vain as a peacock. Her frivolous brain had retained many scandalous anecdotes, which she related to me with great gusto, and which rather amused me. She finally honoured me with her confidence, and one evening, after she had drunk rather too much absinthe, she confessed to me that she adored a handsome young man who returned her affection."

"Philippe de Charny, I suppose?"

"You always anticipate events, as they say in novels, and so destroy my effects. But I forgive you. The young man's name was Philippe, and the woman never wearied of enlarging on his elegance of manner, his good looks, and noble extraction. I concluded, from her description, that he must live upon her earnings, for there was nothing about the poor creature to captivate a gentleman like the one she described; however, as I felt very little interest in the matter, I made no effort to see him. Soon afterwards one of my former instructors selected me to accompany a patient to Italy. A few days before I started, while I was quietly dining in the restaurant, who should burst into the room but the Bracieux woman who snatched my napkin from my hands, and exclaimed. 'His life is in danger.

Come at once! You alone can save him!' I understood, of course, that she referred to her Philippe, and as I am naturally of an obliging disposition, I sacrificed my dinner and followed the poor creature. She conducted me to the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts, which leads into the Place Pigalle, only a few steps from the cook-shop I patronised. She resided there, in a singular house, which we entered by a dingy alley, and after mounting a rickety staircase, she ushered me into a bedchamber where I found a man who seemed to be in a critical condition. He was as pale as death; could move neither hand nor foot, and was nearly speechless. The Bracieux woman had bandaged his head with a soiled napkin which was now soaked with blood. On removing it I found that Philippe had received a severe blow upon the top of his head, apparently from a heavy cudgel. The skull had, fortunately, escaped fracture, but his hands were covered with cuts, which could only have been caused by broken glass. A bullet of small size had passed through the flesh of the right forearm, without fracturing the bones or severing any of the arteries."

"I suppose you asked him who had inflicted these wounds?"

"Of course I did, but I could get no response from him. He doubtless had his reasons for maintaining silence. But I was struck by his appearance. He had a refined and aristocratic face, superb eyes, and a beautiful moustache. After dressing his wounds, and ordering an opiate, I took my leave of the ill-assorted pair; and as the woman lighted me to the door she told me, with an air of mystery, that I had just seen the Count de Charny, a descendant of one of the most distinguished families of France, and that this nobleman had promised to marry her if he succeeded in triumphing over his enemies. I well remember this pompous and enigmatical phrase. I did not inquire what enemies he had to dread, for I took very little interest in the matter; but I was tolerably well satisfied as to the cause of his injuries. In fact, I felt almost positive that the count had injured his hand by shattering a pane of glass with his fist. While attempting to break into an occupied house he was no doubt discovered by the inmates, who gave him a warm reception. Received with blows and pistol-shots, he must have fallen to the pavement below, for I forgot to tell you that his back was covered with bruises which could only have resulted from a fall."

"But in that case he would have lain there and been arrested!"

"It is probable that he did not lose consciousness, and was able to make his escape before he could be seized. I met the Bracieux woman occasionally afterwards, but she was, no doubt, ashamed of the squalor into which she had fallen, for she always avoided me."

"Have you ever seen the Count de Charny since?"

"Never," replied Buzançais, emphatically.

"That is strange," said Carnac. "But would you recognise him if you saw him?"

"Unquestionably. I am a very poor hand at remembering names, but I never forget a face. Besides, this man was not a person one would be likely to forget."

"Well, I hope to bring you face to face with each other. Are you able to testify that Monsieur de Charny was the lover of Marie Bracieux six years ago?"

"Unquestionably, and if he denied it I should ask him to show me his right arm. The scar of his bullet wound must be there still. Besides, it would be of no use for him to deny his former intimacy

with the Bracieux. She boasted of it to me, and probably boasted of it to others."

"But she is dead, unfortunately. It was to prevent her from boasting of the fact that she was murdered."

"Then you suppose that this handsome fellow wanted to get rid of an inconvenient witness. Well, I shouldn't wonder! It wouldn't be the first crime he has committed. But is Gerfaut's daughter really going to marry the scamp? I am surprised that her father should have consented to the match. Where the deuce did they become acquainted with him?"

"At the house of Madame Stenay, who is always giving musical soirées. He has a fine tenor voice, and he has won Camille's heart completely. As you saw just now, her first words were a request to see him."

"But I have postponed that pleasure for a fortnight, at the least."

"She must not be allowed to see him at all. This is the situation, my dear fellow. This titled scoundrel wishes to marry her in order to obtain possession of her fortune, and then put her out of the way, perhaps, after reducing her to poverty. He has persuaded her and Gerfaut to accompany him to Smyrna after the wedding, and I am sure that they will never return if they go. We must save them."

"By unmasking Charny? I am at your service."

"I have already unmasked his accomplice, Margot. She was the person Gerfaut intended to kill when he attacked his daughter. I proved to him that this woman was the person who destroyed his sight; but it will be more difficult to convince him that the Count de Charny is a scoundrel."

"Why have you not denounced him before?"

"I have denounced him, but Gerfaut would not listen to a word against him. However, I am now about to begin a new campaign, and you can aid me. You have more influence over my employer than I have, and he will believe you when you tell him about his future son-in-law's past life. But you must first of all see Charny, in order to be sure that you are not mistaken in the person."

"That's true. But where can I see him?"

"He calls to inquire about the health of his betrothed every day. We might watch for him."

"That would hardly do. We should be taken for detectives."

"There is a club where he spends most of his nights."

"But we don't belong to it. Why not go to his house?"

"I don't know where he lives."

"It won't be a difficult matter to find out. Gerfaut knows."

"I don't care to ask him for the address. It would arouse his suspicions. I know a man who can give it to me—Fertugue."

"Fertugue!" exclaimed Buzançais. "Why, there he stands now, in front of the omnibus office."

"What, do you know him?" asked Carnac.

"I used to know him years ago," replied Buzançais.

"Then I will call him. He certainly won't refuse us a few moments' conversation."

"I should hope not. He has become quite famous, but I don't think success has so spoiled him as to make him snub his former friends. However, if you wish to speak to him, make haste, for he seems to be on the point of entering an omnibus."

"That is strange. Fertugue usually patronises cabs."

As Carnac and his companion watched the artist, they saw him turn away with a gesture of disappointment on perceiving that the omnibus already had its full complement of passengers. He then walked slowly in the direction of the statue of Marshal Moncey, and Carnac rose to go and meet him. "How do you do, my dear fellow?" cried the portrait painter, cordially. "Do you know I'm exasperated. I just now saw a most bewitching girl get into the omnibus, and instantly resolved to follow her to the end of the world, if need be; but there was no room for me. Was there ever such luck?"

"I have been watching you," replied Carnac, drily. "The lady in question was the sister of Marcel Brunier, a young man you have often met at Madame Stenay's."

"Why, I took her for a working-girl!"

"She earns her living by making artificial flowers, but nevertheless she is Mademoiselle Gerfaut's most intimate friend."

"Mademoiselle Gerfaut's most intimate friend! The deuce! I nearly made a terrible blunder, and I am deeply grateful to the stern conductor who waved me back just as I was clambering in. But, tell me, how is Mademoiselle Gerfaut? I was informed that she had met with an accident."

"She had a severe fall in her father's studio—a fall which might have had very serious effects; but she is now out of danger."

"And how about her marriage?"

"I am in hopes that it will never take place. Can you spare me a half hour, and would you object to taking a glass of beer with me and an old acquaintance of yours, Dr. Buzançais?"

"Buzançais! I recollect him very well. Is it possible that he has become a doctor? I have no objections, certainly not; on the contrary, I should be very glad to see him again."

"Come, then. He is sitting over there outside that café."

After a cordial exchange of greetings between the doctor and the artist, Carnac interrupted them by saying: "Now let us have a little serious talk. Fertugue has no time to waste, I know. Do you recollect your offer to assist me in avenging poor Gerfaut?"

"Yes, and it still holds good. Artists should assist and uphold one another. But I cannot imagine how I can be of any service to you. I offered, at Madame Stenay's, the other evening, to make a formal deposition before a commissary of police, but you did not seem to think favourably of the proposal."

"Because I preferred to act alone. Now, I merely wish you to give me the Count de Charny's address."

"But what possible connection can there be between Monsieur de Charny and Gerfaut's accident? Do you hope to induce the count to help you in your efforts? At all events, I don't know his address. It is true, we might find it out at the club. But what do you want with it?"

"Well, the fact is, that the lover who basely deserted Marie Bracieux, after reducing her to penury, was Philippe de Charny."

"Impossible!" cried Fertugue. "I believe Monsieur de Charny quite capable of playing the part of a gay Lothario, but not with a woman of that class."

"But she had been rich," remarked Carnac.

"What has led you to suppose that he was ever her lover?"

"Marie Bracieux told me so," replied the doctor. "I saw him at her house, and I remember his face so well that I am sure I should recognise him instantly if you gave me a chance. When I saw him he was suffering from a severe blow on the head and a bullet in the arm; and his hands were badly cut from shattering a window-pane, apparently. In short, he seemed to be the victim of such accidents as frequently happen to persons who enter a house to commit robbery."

"You ought to have denounced him, if the circumstances seemed so suspicious in character. It is strange, but this affair reminds me of another which must have occurred, I think, about the same time. When did you see Monsieur de Charny in this condition?"

"Early in the winter of the year 1876. I am sure of the date, as I left for Italy a few days afterwards."

"Ah, well, in the month of November, 1876, an attempt was made to rob one of my friends, who then resided in the Rue Fontenelle, at Montmartre—an architect whom Carnac must know by name—Charles Crozon."

"I know him," replied Carnac, "and a stalwart fellow he is."

"And no coward, I assure you. He had just sold a house for a large amount, and the money he had received for it was locked up in his desk. In the middle of the night, he and his wife were awakened by the crash of broken glass. They sprang out of bed. The lady, not being in the least timid, seized a pocket-pistol that was lying on the mantle-shelf; Crozon caught up a stick, and, without taking time to dress, they hasted out to see what was the matter. They found a man who had just opened a window after breaking a pane of glass, in order to reach the fastening, and who had his knee upon the sill ready to climb in. The woman fired at him, and Crozon, with a blow from his stick, sent the thief reeling to the pavement below, where he was picked up by an accomplice and carried away. Crozon would have given chase, but unfortunately he was in his night-clothes; so he and his wife were obliged to content themselves with shouting 'Help! fire!' at the top of their lungs. But the street is almost uninhabited, and there are few passers-by after midnight, so their calls were unanswered. Still, Crozon reported the case to the commissary of police on the following day; and an attempt was made to investigate the matter, but it was not attended with the slightest success."

"At what hour did Marie Bracieux come to the restaurant for you?" asked Carnac, turning to the doctor.

"Between seven and eight o'clock. I was just finishing my dinner."

"But the attempted robbery took place in the middle of the night. In that case, the woman must have sheltered her lover for nearly twenty-four hours before she summoned assistance."

"That could be easily explained. She was afraid to trust any one but me, and she did not know where to find me, as I only dined at the eating-house. Besides, I recollect noticing at the time that the wounds must have been inflicted at least ten or twelve hours before I saw the patient."

"That bit of evidence is conclusive," replied Fertugue, "and I am not at all surprised that you should suspect the count of having killed the woman. He was afraid she might divulge what she knew about him."

"But in that case, why did he wait so long? True, he had ceased to visit her, and had even been hiding from her."

"She had been looking for him everywhere, and must have succeeded in finding him. It is more than likely that she then threatened to denounce him if he did not renew his intimacy with her, or perhaps even

fulfil his promise of marriage. No doubt he pretended to consent, and in that way enticed her to the very house where she had sheltered him years before, and where he murdered her—an effectual way of silencing her. But he had assistants. The man who took the body away on a litter is very probably the same fellow who assisted the count in effecting an entrance into my friend Crozon's window. What has become of him?"

"He is dead," replied Carnac. "He was denounced by some one, and the police attempted to arrest him. He tried to escape by the roof, and fell from the top of a five-floor building."

"Then there is no information to be gained from him," muttered Fertugue, thoughtfully. "We must find Margot, whom Marie Bracieux often spoke to me about. Unfortunately, I never saw her."

"You are very much mistaken. I was with you when you met her at Madame Stenay's."

"You must be jesting."

"Not the least in the world. Margot now calls herself Madame Marguerite de Carouge."

"The singer just returned from Russia! Impossible! What proof have you of that?"

"I have more than one, I assure you. The most conclusive of all is that I have in my possession the dress she wore when she threw the vitriol in Gerfaut's face. I can secure her arrest whenever I please."

"I think not, for she is no longer in Paris. I went to Madame Stenay's last Wednesday. But Madame de Carouge was not there, and the hostess informed me that the fair songstress had just left for England, where she was to give a concert."

"This means that she left the country as soon as she found that I had discovered her real character. It makes very little difference, as it is not she that I wish to reach, but the Count de Charny."

"So as to prevent him from marrying Gerfaut's daughter? I understand. But he did not leave a fragment of his overcoat in the door, unfortunately."

"No, I am even quite positive that he was not in the house at the time the vitriol was thrown."

"Then how can you prove that he was an accomplice? Margot has crossed the frontier; the bearer of the litter is dead. The evidence of Buzançais is all that you have to depend upon, and that proves nothing, except that Marie Bracieux was the count's mistress six years ago."

"Excuse me, but this is not a question of ensuring Charny's conviction by the criminal court. All I desire is to prevent the marriage."

"By denouncing the count to Gerfaut and his daughter?"

"No; they would not believe me. By threatening to deliver him up to justice if he does not relinquish his claims."

"That isn't a bad idea, though I am afraid that he won't take any notice of your threats. He has wonderful assurance, and he knows that you cannot injure him."

"I can show him an article which will make him reflect—a ring bearing his coat of arms and family motto, which was found at the door of a pawnshop where Madame de Carouge had just redeemed it, thanks to a pawn-ticket stolen, I am satisfied, from Marie Bracieux, as may be easily proved by an examination of the books of the Mont-de-Piété. This ring is in my possession. Would you like to see it?"

"No. I believe you, of course, and I begin to think that it may be in your power to intimidate Charny after all."

"My plan is this," replied Carnac. "Buzançais and I will call on the count together. Buzançais will remind him of the medical services he rendered him at the house of Marie Bracieux; and I shall exhibit the ring, and also a note from Madame de Carouge, in which she confesses that she destroyed Gerfaut's sight."

"And I will accompany you and refer to the attempted robbery at my friend Crozon's house."

"What! will you consent to do that?"

"Why not? I have no particular reason for wishing to spare the count's feelings, and if you take my advice, you will come with me at once to the club, where we can obtain his address. Then we can go straight to his house, and if we don't find him there we can repeat our visit to-morrow."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Carnac and Buzançais in the same breath; and the trio at once started off.

"I saw the count at the club one evening last week," said Fertugue on the way. "He was hanging about the baccarat table like a soul in distress, but he took no part in the game, though the stakes were extremely insignificant. They say he has not played since his late defeat, and I should not be surprised if he were financially embarrassed."

"Margot has probably ceased to supply him with funds. Perhaps that is why he is in such a hurry to get married."

"Well, who is to begin the attack upon him?"

"I am," replied Carnac. "I shall refer to his connection with Madame de Carouge, and tell him I know that this pretended *prima donna* was formerly called Margot with the scar, and that she blinded Gerfaut, and probably assisted in the murder of Marie Bracieux. Then Buzançais will come to the rescue, and remind the count of the medical services he rendered him. We will conclude by exacting from him a solemn promise never to set foot in Gerfaut's house again, and to relinquish all claim to the hand of Mademoiselle Camille. Indeed, I shall not be content with a promise; he must give us a written pledge to that effect."

"You won't get that, for it would be equivalent to a confession of his guilt. But we might require him to leave Paris within a week, under penalty of being denounced on the eighth day, and with the express condition that if he ventures to write to Mademoiselle Gerfaut a complaint will at once be lodged against him. However, I warn you that the interview will probably be a stormy one. Charny will make a desperate fight, and it would not surprise me if he challenged one or all of us."

"The easiest and safest way of getting rid of him would be to kill him," said our student of nature, thoughtfully. "I am an excellent swordsman."

"And I am a good shot," remarked Buzançais, "and if opportunity offers I will undertake to lodge a bullet in his brain."

Just then they reached the club-house. The illustrious Cambron happened to be descending the steps, and Fertugue asked him for the Count de Charny's address. "He is upstairs now, if you wish to see him," was the reply. "He has turned his attention to billiards."

"He is hard up, then?" inquired Fertugue.

"Yes, everybody knows that. He has done nothing but lose since your game with him. He has several times tried to borrow some money from me, but I won't lend him a penny, for he already owes Auguste more than fifteen thousand francs. You will find him in the billiard-room, playing with Vermandois."

As he spoke, Cambron passed on, but not without casting an inquisitive glance at Fertugue's companions.

"Well, I think we had better take advantage of the opportunity," remarked the portrait painter. "This is a better place than Charny's house, for he might refuse to admit us; while here he will be compelled to grant us a hearing. At this time of day the club is well-nigh deserted, and we shall have no difficulty in finding a corner where we can talk freely."

Carnac and Buzançais then followed Fertugue indoors. It so happened that Auguste was in the first room they entered. He at once bowed to Fertugue, and coming forward, said obsequiously: "Will you grant me a moment's conversation, sir? I should like to speak to you on a private matter."

"What is it? You can speak freely before these gentlemen. They are personal friends of mine," was the reply.

"You are an artist, sir," resumed Auguste; "so you must know Monsieur Gerfaut, a sculptor, who resides on the Boulevard des Batignolles. Can you tell me if he is very rich?"

"He has an income of at least sixty thousand francs."

"And is the Count de Charny going to marry his daughter?"

"It is so reported. But why do you ask? Does the count owe you any money?"

"A few hundred louis; but I am not at all uneasy about them, as he is about to marry an heiress. I am greatly obliged to you, sir, and assure you that I shall be glad to be of service to you at any time."

Fertugue passed on without taking any notice of this obliging offer, and after crossing two or three more rooms he opened a door and suddenly ushered his allies into the enemy's presence.

The count was half reclining upon the billiard table, preparing to execute a difficult shot. However, the unexpected apparition of Carnac made him miss his aim, to the great delight of his opponent, Vermandois. "Why, here is Fertugue!" exclaimed the latter. "What chance brings you here at this hour?"

"I wished to show the club to these friends of mine."

"But this is not the first time Monsieur Carnac has been here, as Charny certainly has reason to know. If you were partner with him in that memorable game, you must have won at least ten thousand francs apiece. Well, I hope you won't be satisfied with that. Charny has stopped playing for the time being, but the prince keeps the bank every evening and is having a wonderful run of luck."

"It is your turn to play," interrupted the count, impatiently.

"In one moment, my dear fellow. I am going to try for the red, and mean to pocket your ball. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty—dash it! I missed that. I played too hard."

M. de Charny, visibly annoyed, was watching Carnac out of the corner of his eye, but paid no heed to Buzançais, whom he failed to recognise. Carnac had concentrated his attention upon the count's left hand, on the little finger of which glittered the ring he had remarked at Madame Stenay's soirée. Buzançais was watching every movement of the count's right arm, which the wide shirt-cuffs partially disclosed to view, for both players had taken off their coats. The game was finally won by Vermandois, who exclaimed, as he threw down his cue, "My dear fellow, you owe me a napoleon."

M. de Charny replied by flinging a gold piece upon the table.

"Don't you want your revenge?"

"No, I am going."

On hearing this announcement, Carnac and his friends exchanged anxious glances. How were they to prevent this intended departure? Vermandois was present, and they did not wish to arouse his suspicions by asking for an interview; he would surely imagine that something unusual had occurred, and being a great talker, he would not fail to mention the incident to all the members of the club. It was the doctor who solved this rather difficult problem, and he did so before Philippe had time to take down his coat, which was hanging on a peg near by. "I see that you don't recognise me," he said approaching the count.

"No, sir, I do not," replied M. de Charny, in evident astonishment. "To the best of my belief we have never met before."

"Your memory is a poor one. Wounds in the head often produce this effect upon their victims."

"I don't understand you."

"No more do I," remarked Vermandois, suspecting no trouble. "I will go and see if the prince has come, and if I find him I shall tell him that there are some new players here."

No one felt any desire to detain him, not even M. de Charny, who began to apprehend a dangerous interview, and, therefore, did not care for witnesses. "Do you recollect the little house in the Rue de l'Elysée des Beaux Arts?" continued Buzançais as soon as Vermandois had disappeared.

"I have no idea what you mean," replied the count, calmly. Nevertheless he had turned visibly paler, and Carnac perceived it.

"You were lying on the bed of the woman who then occupied the house, and who had summoned me because I was a physician. You had received a violent blow on the skull, a bullet in the right forearm, a little above the wrist, and your hands——"

"I repeat that you are entirely mistaken. You were probably called in to attend some injured person who resembled me."

"No, it was you. The woman told me your name. She was very proud of her connection with the Count Philippe de Charny."

"So you were foolish enough to believe the falsehoods of a vile creature who had probably heard me spoken of, and so boasted of knowing me?"

"She spoke no falsehood. If any one has told an untruth it is you, and here is the proof of it," said the doctor, catching hold of the count's arm, and pushing back his shirt sleeve. "You still bear the mark of the bullet that wounded you; the scar is still plainly visible."

M. de Charny disengaged himself, and then, with a sudden change of tone and manner, he said: "I am not disposed to listen to this nonsense any longer, sir; still less to bear your insinuations. What are you aiming at? Are you trying to pick a quarrel with me?"

"No, we only desire an explanation," rejoined Fertugue.

"Ah, so you wish to have a finger in the pie also! What do you want of me?"

"I merely wish to say that at the time when my friend Dr. Buzançais attended you an attempt was made to break into the house of another of my friends in the Rue de l'ontenelle, at Montmartre, and that the thief received several severe blows from a stick, and also a bullet in his arm."

"And you accuse me of being that thief! Very well, I shall not de-

grade myself by replying to your accusation, but I declare you shall give me satisfaction for this outrageous insult."

"You shall have satisfaction when you convince me that you are not guilty of the crime referred to, and that you had nothing to do with the murder that cost my friend Tiburce Gerfaut so dear."

"A murder now! You must certainly be mad!"

"Marie Bracieux, your former mistress, was hanged by a scoundrel who would be in the hands of the police if he had not been killed by a fall from a house top. She was murdered in the same house where Buzançais saw you years ago. It was in that very house, too, that the vile creature who threw the vitriol in Gerfaut's face was lying in ambush. I need not tell you that. You must be familiar with the whole affair, as you are going to marry his daughter."

"The young lady you yourself hoped to marry," interrupted Philippe de Charny. "I begin to fathom the cause of your animosity."

"You are very much mistaken. I have long since recovered from my disappointment at not having been able to please Mademoiselle Gerfaut; but I and my friends sincerely deplore the fact that you have succeeded in winning her favour, and I swear to you that if you do not renounce her, Mademoiselle Gerfaut shall hear the truth about you."

"A threat! I was not unprepared for it. Monsieur Carnac, no doubt, has undertaken the task of enlightening the father and daughter."

"The father has already been apprised of your true character," replied Carnac. "My employer knows who the woman was that threw the vitriol at him; but he does not yet know that this woman is on intimate terms with you. I do not make this assertion without being able to prove it."

"Very well, then, begin by proving it to me," said the count.

"Nothing would please me better. You have on your finger a ring bearing your coat-of-arms——"

"What of that, if you please?"

"Would you like me to show you the same crest and device engraved upon an amethyst?"

On hearing this question the count's discomfiture was unmistakable, but he quickly recovered himself, although his voice trembled a little, as he replied: "Yes, I should like to see what you speak of."

"And I am delighted to be able to gratify you, Monsieur le Comte," replied Carnac, with ironical politeness. "Here is a ring that belongs to you. I cannot trust it in your hands, but I am willing to allow you to look at it as closely as you please."

"At all events, I certainly never gave it to you; so you must——"

"Have stolen it? No, I found it."

"And kept it, which is almost equivalent to stealing it."

"I have made several ineffectual efforts to restore it, but the person who lost it absolutely refused to take it. She had her reasons for being unwilling to take it from me, and yet she was anxious to recover it, for she has advertised that she will give a reward of three hundred francs to any person who will return it to one of her friends."

"And how does this story concern me, if you please?"

"Wait a moment, count. I have not finished. I found the ring in the passage of a pawn office, where it had been dropped by a lady you know very well, for you sang a duet with her at Madame Stenay's. She was leaving the pawn-shop, where she had just redeemed several articles she held in her hand, when she dropped this ring; and shortly afterwards

she requested Madame Langoumois, a second-hand clothes dealer, to offer a large reward for its recovery."

"It is to Madame de Carouge that you allude, I suppose."

"Yes, sir, and it is useless for you to deny your acquaintance with her, for this same dealer in second-hand clothes saw you at Madame de Carouge's residence in the Rue d'Anjou."

"I do not deny that I have visited the lady, but——"

"Pardon me! Madame Langoumois recognised you instantly as this lady's former lover. This was prior to her departure for Russia, and when she was known as Margot with the scar."

"To hear you one would suppose that I was a gay Lothario. This is quite an interesting romance. What is your motive, pray?"

"I will soon enlighten you. It was Margot who helped to murder Marie Bracieux, and who burned out M. Gerfaut's eyes. We have conclusive proofs of this. She left a scrap of one of her dresses in the house. This scrap is in the possession of the authorities, and the dress from which it was torn is at Gerfaut's house. But all this is no news to you, as you must have seen Madame de Carouge before she left Paris for the second time."

"I was not aware that she had left the city," replied the count, a faint smile curling his lips.

"Whether she has left it or not, she was your mistress. You deserted Marie Bracieux for her sake, and Marie Bracieux spent her life in searching for you and cursing Margot."

"I can testify to that," said Fertugue. "She told me so every time I gave her alms on the street."

"And I can testify that I saw you at her house, and dressed the wounds of which you still bear the scars," added Buzançais.

"Here are two facts proved," continued the student of nature, "and those which follow can be readily explained. Marie Bracieux finally succeeded in ferretting you out, just as you had succeeded in winning the affections of Mademoiselle Gerfaut, and were about to marry her. Your old flame was in your way. She doubtless possessed papers that compromised you—among others, the pawn-ticket for this ring. You entered into a plot with Margot to suppress Marie Bracieux, and Margot was entrusted with the execution of the plan. You were her accomplice. Monsieur Gerfaut is still ignorant of this fact, but do you think he will be inclined to give you his daughter when he knows it?"

"Is that all you have to say?" inquired M. de Charny, coldly.

"I have only to add that you are entirely at the mercy of myself and my friends, and that we propose to denounce you to the police. They have ceased following up this affair since the death of your paid assassin; but it is not forgotten."

"Then why have you not already entered a complaint?"

"Because I wished to spare my employer the grief and mortification of learning the real character of the man he had accepted as a son-in-law; but I assure you that this consideration will not deter me if you refuse to submit to the conditions I impose as the price of my silence."

"Conditions now! Let me hear them, if you please."

"I give you one week in which to leave the country. If you are still in France at the end of that time, I shall have you arrested; and if you venture to present yourself at Monsieur Gerfaut's house in the meantime, or to write to his daughter, I shall not fail to know it, and the truce will

instantly be broken. Now I have said all I have to say, and am waiting for your reply."

Since the beginning of the conversation, the count's manner had been well worthy of notice. Surprised at first, and then troubled, he had quickly regained his self-possession, which did not fail him for a single instant afterwards. One would have thought that he was the accuser, for the three friends were apparently much more excited than he was. "And this is my reply," he said, after a short silence. "I might vindicate myself completely here and now, but you would not listen to me. I shall occupy myself in collecting proofs, which will effectually silence your infamous accusations. These proofs I will produce at the end of the week specified. In the meantime, you are at liberty to act as you see fit. If you enter a complaint against me, it will only be necessary for me to divulge all the facts of the case to the magistrate to whom you denounce me, and I assure you that this explanation will result in your utter discomfiture."

"Come," said Carnac, "do you accept the truce?"

"I accept nothing. I will see you again at the expiration of the time you yourself have fixed. Before the end of that time, however, I shall have compelled you to admit that your conduct in this matter has not been that of gentlemen, by any means. I shall demand personal satisfaction, and I trust that not one of you will refuse to grant it."

"That depends," replied Carnac.

"What! you recoil? You slander, but you refuse to fight?"

"I do not shrink from the consequences of my action, by any means, but an honourable man cannot fight with a criminal. We shall first demand the proofs you promise to furnish."

"Very well, I am sure now that I shall have no further trouble with you after next week; and having nothing more to say to you, I bid you good-day with all the consideration due to you." With this insolent leave-taking, M. de Charny put on his coat, placed his hat upon his head and went off, leaving his three enemies, not discomfited, but perplexed.

"What audacity!" exclaimed Fertugue. "Upon my word of honour, one would positively think that he had done nothing whatever to be ashamed of. I am satisfied that he is guilty, but I think he will make it very difficult for us to prove it. However, we must wait patiently, protect Mademoiselle Gerfaut from any possible danger, and watch the count vigilantly, without seeming to do so. I will ask Auguste for his address. You, my dear fellow, must find out the address of Gerfaut's notary, and after you have learned it, I will go to him and endeavour to ascertain what Monsieur de Charny's fortune consists of. The count must have made himself out to be the possessor of some capital or other, or else the two notaries would not have entered into negotiations. But there is nothing more to be done here. Let us go."

Just then Auguste entered the room. He came for a cane that the count had forgotten, and on hearing the question addressed to him, he unhesitatingly replied: "I think he has no particular residence now. The furniture of his rooms on the Boulevard Haussmann has been seized for debt, and I have reason to know that he has not slept there for three nights. Ah, it is time the marriage came off. And, by the way, gentlemen, I count upon your discretion, for if the prospective father-in-law learned that Monsieur de Charny is so deeply in debt, there would be very little chance of my getting my fifteen thousand francs."

Fertugue gave a vague promise and then led away his allies, who were only moderately satisfied with the result of this first engagement. As they stepped out upon the pavement, they perceived M. de Charny entering a cab, drawn up about ten yards from the door of the club-house. The vehicle instantly started off, turning into the Boulevard Haussmann. "There was a woman in it," said Buzançais.

"What if it were Margot?" exclaimed Carnac.

"It would be a fine thing for us," replied Fertugue. "In that case, we should only have to arrest the creature. I anticipate no such good luck; but I thought it would do no harm to know the number of the cab, so I took special note of it."

## IX.

THE week was drawing to a close, and the truce also. Camille Gerfaut was up and about again. She had resumed her old habits, and every day, leaning on the arm of Cousin Brigitte, she went down to the studio with her father, who scarcely dared to speak to her. The poor man could not forget that he had wounded his own daughter, and that it was only by a miracle that she had survived the injuries he had inflicted. She had never asked for any explanation; but he felt sure that she knew the truth, and that her silence could only be due to a fear of wounding him by questioning him in regard to the tragical mistake which had so nearly deprived her of life.

Gerfaut, however, could not refrain from questioning Carnac about Madame de Carouge; and Carnac did not yet deem it prudent to tell his instructor all he knew. He confined himself to saying that Madame de Carouge had disappeared, and had probably left France; but he made no allusion whatever to M. de Charny who had not visited the sculptor's house since his stormy interview with the three friends. Carnac took advantage of his absence to bring Marcel and Annette to the Batignolles studio as often as possible. Camille received them very cordially. She had discovered that Annette loved Carnac, and she was fully aware of Marcel's love for her; but though she seemed to appreciate his worth, and to bestow upon him the same sincere friendship she felt for the sister, she was a victim to the most profound melancholy. This evident depression of spirits seemed even to retard her recovery. She did not know whether to accuse Philippe of indifference or to cast the blame upon those who had prevented her betrothed from seeing her.

In the meantime, Fertugue had paid a visit to Gerfaut's notary, and had ascertained that the count had proved himself to be the owner of bonds and securities to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. The marriage contract had not yet been signed, so these securities were still in his hands, but they would have to be returned to their owner as soon as the document was signed. Mademoiselle Gerfaut would bring her husband a dowry of one million francs, Gerfaut having only reserved for himself the house in which he lived, although he was entitled to a handsome income by the provisions of Aunt Marlotte's will. Fertugue was of opinion that the count had borrowed the bonds he had displayed to the notary from Madame de Carouge, and that they would be returned to the latter after the wedding, together with a handsome portion of the bride's dowry for the assistance rendered. Margot and the count would, in fact,

share Camille's fortune; perhaps they would even make away with her and her father during the trip to the East.

As M. de Charny had not recently been seen either at the club or at his apartments on the Boulevard Haussmann, Fertugue started out in pursuit of the driver of the cab which the count had entered in his presence. Fertugue knew the number of the vehicle, so he had no difficulty in finding the coachman; and the promise of a twenty-franc piece made the jehu eager to disclose all he knew. He told his questioner that on the day referred to he took up a closely-veiled lady who ordered him to drive her to the club-house and stop a short distance from the entrance. He waited there nearly twenty minutes. The lady did not leave the vehicle, but a gentleman entered it, after telling him to drive to the corner of the Boulevard Ornano and the Rue Labat, where they had remained only for a moment. He afterwards drove them to Neuilly, where they dismissed him on the Boulevard d'Argenson, after paying him liberally. The lady was very plainly dressed, and the coachman did not succeed in catching a glimpse of her face; but the description he gave of her general appearance reminded Fertugue forcibly of Madame de Carouge.

From this rather vague information, he concluded that Margot must be living at Neuilly, and that she was sheltering her lover in her new home. The drive they had taken together to the Rue Labat could only be explained by some evil design against Marcel Brunier or his sister, for it was their house that the veiled lady had entered. Fertugue satisfied himself of this fact, by questioning the door-keeper who informed him that the lady had inquired if Mademoiselle Brunier did not reside on the fourth floor of the house; and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, she had taken her departure, announcing that she would soon return to give an order. Fertugue reported this to Carnac, who thought it his duty to warn Annette, beseeching her not to admit any stranger in her brother's absence, and to be on her guard whenever she went out. He did not deem it advisable to say more until the expiration of the appointed time.

The count had boasted of his ability to procure irrefutable proofs of his innocence; but he had not promised to leave the country if he failed to do so, and now that he had disappeared how were they to compel him to leave France? How prevent him from taking advantage of this respite to enter into new machinations, and suddenly re-appear again, after he had succeeded in regaining his old power over Camille Gerfaut's heart? Fertugue had not yet succeeded in discovering his residence, although he spent the greater part of his time walking about Neuilly. He dared not apply to the police, and the information he obtained at the club amounted to nothing. Vermandois was of opinion that the count was irretrievably ruined, and Auguste seemed to have given his fifteen thousand francs up for lost. The resignation of this merciless usurer greatly surprised Fertugue, who often wondered if Auguste had not come to an understanding with his debtor; the latter had perhaps contrived to conciliate him by promises based upon his expectations of a marriage with a wealthy heiress.

Matters were in this state, when one day Camille, who was nearly well, although she had not yet left the house, opened a window to breathe a little fresh air. She was alone. Her father was talking with Carnac in the studio down-stairs, and Brigitte was attending to household duties. The doctor had just taken leave, well pleased with his patient's progress. Evening was coming on, but the air was mild, and there were plenty of promenaders on the boulevard. Camille, after two weeks of seclusion,

took a genuine pleasure in gazing out of the window, and suddenly her attention was arrested by a man standing in front of the house—an elderly man, whom she did not know, but who certainly knew her, for he raised his hat to salute her, at the same time showing her something that he held in his hand. Camille was about to shut the window in his face, when he adroitly threw the object he held into the room; and then, retreating a short distance, he seated himself on a bench in the middle of the boulevard.

Speechless with astonishment, Camille gazed at the strange projectile, and saw written on the wrapper, in bold characters: "To Mademoiselle Camille Gerfaut." Who could have resorted to this clandestine means of communicating with her? The thought that it was Philippe de Charny at once flashed through her mind. For some time she had strongly suspected that he was prevented from seeing her; so it did not seem to her at all improbable that his letters might have been intercepted. "Yes, he has been received so ungraciously that he no longer dares to call on me," said Camille to herself, "but he has persuaded one of his friends to watch the house in the hope that I might come to the window. Every one in the house refrains from mentioning his name before me, and whenever I speak of him, I only obtain evasive replies. What is the meaning of this conspiracy? I will know, I must know! And this letter will probably tell me."

She picked up the object, which proved to be a small orange, around which a letter was securely tied. With trembling hands she tore the missive open, and saw that her suspicions were correct. The letter was from Philippe, and read as follows: "What have I done? How have I offended you? I thought you loved me. Have you driven me from your heart, as I have been driven from your house? We plighted each other our troth. Have you forgotten it? or have those around you resolved to keep you in seclusion in order to separate us for ever? Is it possible that they have basely slandered me to you? Have they dared to tell you that I was playing you false, and that I wished to marry you merely for the sake of your fortune? Have they concealed from you the fact that I am dying of grief since your father has closed his doors against me? They know it, however, for I have renounced society. I spend my days in deploring my unhappy fate, and my nights in walking up and down in front of your windows. But some of your friends are my implacable enemies, and no doubt they have succeeded in convincing Monsieur Gerfaut that there is some truth in their infamous calumnies. If you, too, have given credence to their falsehoods—if you no longer love me, there is but one thing left for me to do. I shall leave France. My uncle implores me to go to Smyrna to close his dying eyes. I shall go, never to return, for I cannot live without you. But though I may have lost your love, I cannot endure the thought of taking away with me your scorn and contempt; so, I beseech you to allow me to see you again, if only for a few moments, in order that I may be able to vindicate myself. After that, you shall be troubled no further by me. A faithful and devoted friend will try to deliver this letter to you. If he succeeds, grant me the one boon I ask of you. Consent to talk with him, and to listen to his despairing appeal in my behalf. If you refuse—if you no longer care for me—dismiss him with a gesture. It will be my death-warrant, and I will charge myself with its execution."

"He means that he will kill himself," murmured Camille, despairingly.

"And it is in my power to prevent the rash deed. I will show this letter to my father, and ask him what Philippe has done that he should be banished from our house. Show it to my father! Alas! he cannot read it, and he is now in the studio with Carnac, who hates Monsieur de Charny. Brigitte also hates him. They will expostulate with me and detain me, and Philippe will think that I have refused his last request. That must not be. I will tell the friend he has sent what is going on here. Shall I call him in? No, the outside door is locked, and he will be refused admission. But I am much stronger now, strong enough to go out on the boulevard, and talk with him. What does it matter if they scold me? I shan't be doing wrong, for it will save the life of the man who loves me."

While these troubled thoughts were passing swiftly through her mind, Camille approached the window almost unconsciously. As she did so, she glanced out, and again saw the messenger. He was standing now, and he bowed, bestowing upon her, at the same time, a most eloquent and imploring glance. The man was not young. His age and his respectful attitude decided her. She forgot everything—her physical weakness, her father, who she was sure would not approve of the rash step she was about to take—and unhesitatingly, guided by the irresistible impulse of her heart, she hastened out of the room and down the stairs. To reach the front door she was obliged to pass the door of the studio, and she felt a pang of remorse as the thought of her disobedience again occurred to her. She hesitated, but just then she heard Jean Carnac's voice saying: "I assure you, sir, that this nobleman is a villain of the deepest dye."

Philippe de Charny a villain! Philippe, whom she still loved, and who had just sent her such a touching appeal! She could no longer doubt that a conspiracy had been formed by those around her to drive away the count, and to supplant him. She hesitated no longer.

It was the first time she had ever left the house unaccompanied, and in such a costume!—slippers, a long dressing-gown, and a tiny morning cap on her head. However, no one saw her flight, although Brigitte was not far off.

The man seemed to have expected that she was coming, for he had drawn a little nearer, and was now standing on the pavement close to the wall of a garden next to the Gerfaut's house. This messenger had a rather full, pleasant, smoothly-shaven face, and his manner was grave but kindly. "Mademoiselle," he began earnestly, "I beg you will excuse the means I have been compelled to adopt to enter into communication with you. It was necessity alone that made me resort to them, for this is the sixth day I have spent on the boulevard, out of compassion for the deplorable situation of an old friend's nephew."

"You come at the request of Monsieur de Charny, I believe?" stammered Camille, blushing deeply.

"Yes, mademoiselle, and I assure you that I should not have consented to become the bearer of the letter you have just read under any ordinary circumstances. I am a married man, the father of a family; I know your father's respectability, and your own, but Philippe has been unjustly accused. I love him as if he were my own son, and I could not refuse to render him the service he asked."

"Why did he not come himself?"

"Because it would only have exposed him to fresh insults. His enemies would not have failed to say that he was trying to compromise you by hanging about the house. You are not aware that a conspiracy

has been formed to keep him away from you. You are closely guarded, and your house is constantly watched. His presence on the boulevard would have been remarked at once; but I am not known, so I aroused no suspicions."

"But in this letter Monsieur de Charny asks to see me, and begs me to grant him an interview, so I thought——"

"That he was somewhere in the vicinity? He wanted to accompany me, but I opposed it. I did not wish him to be exposed to the danger of being seen talking to you in the street; I convinced him that he had no right to risk a public scandal which might injure your reputation."

"What does he wish, then?" asked Camille, with a searching look.

"I scarcely dare to tell you, and yet I must. Monsieur de Charny begs you to come to *him*, as he cannot come to you. Oh, not to his house! I would not consent to that. The interview is to take place in the presence of witnesses. A lady whom you know, and whose intentions you cannot distrust—Madame Stenay—will be present. She has frequently called, but has never been admitted to see you."

"I know it; I have not been able to receive visitors, but it is different now."

"She would still be refused admission. She is disliked, as it was through her that you became acquainted with Monsieur de Charny."

"Does she expect me at her house?"

"No, mademoiselle," replied the messenger, rather reluctantly. "I owe it to myself to explain the situation exactly as it is. Madame Stenay is afraid of becoming involved in a quarrel with your father, so she prefers to meet you at the house of one of her friends, with whom you are likewise acquainted, and whose presence is still another guaranty for you—at the house of Madame de Carouge."

"At the house of Madame de Carouge! I will not go there."

"Then nothing is left for Philippe but to die," murmured the man, in a tone of intense sadness.

"Is it then really true that his life is in danger?" asked Camille.

"I scarcely dare to answer you, mademoiselle," said the messenger, in a voice trembling with emotion. "You will perhaps think that I am trying to frighten you into accompanying me. No matter. It is my duty to speak. Know, then, that I left Philippe with a loaded pistol in his hand. 'I can bear this no longer,' he said to me, 'my suffering is intolerable. Leave no means untried to get my letter to Mademoiselle Gerfaut to-day, for this attempt will be my last. I have written to Madame Stenay, asking her to meet me at the house of Madame de Carouge, at two o'clock; and I am sure that she will be there. I will persuade her to remain until six. We will wait for you there. If by six o'clock you have not arrived, or if you bring me a refusal I shall kill myself this evening.' The fact is, he is in a state of intense mental excitement that verges on madness, and it is useless to attempt to argue with a madman."

"Tell him that I bid him live, that I will speak to my father this very evening, and will certainly write to him to-morrow."

M. de Charny's envoy shook his head despondently. "Alas, mademoiselle, Philippe will not believe me," he replied. "He will imagine that I have invented this story as a means of gaining time, and that you have refused to see him. It will be useless for me to beg of him to wait until to-morrow. With his ardent nature and indomitable will, if he does not see you this evening he will be a dead man to-morrow."

"No, no, he must not, he shall not kill himself!" cried the young girl, wildly. "I will see him. Bring him to me."

"Here? You certainly cannot think of such a thing, mademoiselle. As you are willing to see him, be still more generous. If his life were not at stake I would not insist. But what have you to fear? In an hour you will be at home again, and you can tell your father all. You will then be able to judge of the situation more clearly. Philippe only asks your permission to plead his cause before Monsieur Gerfaut, and silence his slanderers. Your presence will calm him, and afterwards it will be in your power to have him re-admitted to your house."

This last argument seemed to make an impression upon Camille. "So Monsieur de Charny will not require me to renew my engagement to him without my father's consent?" she asked, gazing searchingly at the messenger.

"Certainly not; for he knows very well that you would refuse."

"And if my father does not give his consent, does Monsieur de Charny suppose that I shall dispense with it?"

"No, mademoiselle; but I am sure that I can persuade him not to take his own life if he hears, from your own lips, that he has not lost your esteem, and that your feelings towards him have not changed. He would love you without hope, it is true, but he would at least have the consolation of knowing that you still cared for him; and this knowledge would console him, at least in a measure." And as the persuasive ambassador saw, by Camille's face, that his eloquence had touched her, he added:—"Besides, shall I not be present? A short drive in the company of a man of my years has nothing very alarming about it. My carriage is waiting for me. You can see it standing over there. If you will come with me I will promise to bring you back in less than an hour, and I will then explain to Monsieur Gerfaut your conduct and mine, if you desire it."

"I hold you to this promise. I believe you have told me nothing but the truth, and I am ready to accompany you."

These words were spoken firmly and composedly. Re-assured by the frank, paternal tone and manner of the count's respectable friend, Camille had decided to make the experiment, and nothing could now have induced her to change her decision. Nor did her companion give her time to reconsider. He immediately offered her his arm, which she accepted, and led her to a brougham which was standing at the corner of the next street. Having assisted her into the carriage he took a seat beside her, after saying a few words to the rather shabbily-dressed coachman; and the vehicle then started off in the direction of the Parc Monceau. "Madame de Carouge resides in the Rue d'Anjou, I believe," remarked Camille.

"She has moved, mademoiselle, and now resides in a charming little house which she has recently purchased at Neuilly."

"Neuilly!" exclaimed Camille. "What! so far away?"

"Don't be alarmed, my dear young lady," said the count's envoy, kindly; "my horse travels very swiftly, and your absence from home will not exceed the time specified."

"You have promised to remain with me."

"And so I will, if you desire it. In any case, Madame Stenay will be present."

"And Madame de Carouge also, you said, did you not?"

"That is for you to decide. She will not intrude herself upon you uninvited."

"I thought Monsieur de Charny knew her but slightly," murmured Camille, beginning, now that it was too late, to realise the strangeness of this assignation."

Not that the poor child had the slightest suspicion of the truth. Her father, Brigitte, and Carnac had all taken pains to conceal it from her. They had allowed her to suppose that when Gerfaut attacked her he was only practising fencing in his studio, and that the wound had been inflicted entirely by chance. She merely knew that Madame de Carouge had ceased to visit the house, and that her name was sedulously avoided. Camille's companion was too shrewd not to perceive the doubts that had suddenly beset her, and too clever not to try to re-assure her. "Philippe's acquaintance with Madame de Carouge merely dates from their meeting in Madame Stenay's drawing room, and he would never have asked you to meet him at her house had Madame Stenay been willing for him to see you under her roof. But this is not all. He has heard that the persons who slandered him have slandered Madame de Carouge as well; and so that his vindication should be complete he wished to bring that lady into your presence. She consented, because she attached great value to your good opinion, and because, as your father has closed his doors against her, she can scarcely hope to see you anywhere else. But I repeat, mademoiselle, that you are quite at liberty to see only Monsieur de Charny and Madame Stenay, if you prefer it."

Camille made no reply. The explanation seemed tolerably satisfactory, as she did not analyse it very carefully. Her thoughts were elsewhere. She was thinking of the approaching interview—of what Philippe would say to her, and what she would say in reply. Her companion showed no inclination to trouble her with unnecessary comments, and relapsed into a prudent silence, taking care to maintain the grave and melancholy manner suited to the occasion.

They had passed the Parc Monceau, the Avenue de Wagram, and the Avenue des Ternes, and were now rolling along the Boulevard d'Argenson. It had become quite dark, and Camille could not help noticing how deserted the neighbourhood seemed. She did not know exactly where she was, still less where her guide was taking her, for the man had said Neuilly, without designating the exact locality, and she had not thought of questioning him. At last, however, the carriage, turning to the left, entered a dimly lighted street, and paused in front of an iron gateway which opened into a garden. "Here we are, mademoiselle," said Camille's guide, hastily opening the door of the vehicle and springing out.

Camille accepted his proffered hand and alighted without any urging, although the place was by no means attractive in its aspect. The carriage had stopped midway along a broad street which branched off from the Boulevard d'Argenson, and which looked much more like a country road than a street in the suburbs of Paris. Houses that were apparently unoccupied alternated with long stretches of garden wall. They were probably summer residences, whose owners had deserted them and returned to town. No lighted shop was visible, nor any pedestrian, nor a vehicle of any description; and the only sound was the clatter of the omnibuses passing along the Avenue de Neuilly, which could not be far off. Camille instinctively felt that this silence and gloom were ominous; and she began to repent of this step she had taken. But it was too late to retreat. "Where are we?" she asked, trying to conceal her fears.

"At the entrance of the little villa which Madame de Carouge lately

purchased," replied her companion, carelessly. "I see you are surprised that the place has such a gloomy air. But she has not had time to organise her establishment yet, and in fact I believe that the only servant she has secured is a gardener. Fortunately, the gate is open, as the inmates of the house are expecting us. If you will allow me, mademoiselle, I will accompany you into the house. You cannot see it from here; the shrubbery conceals it from view. Will you take my arm? I am sure that Philippe heard the carriage stop, and that he must be impatient to learn his fate. How delighted he will be when he sees that I am not alone!"

This last remark put an end to Camille's hesitation, and she followed her companion up a winding path where she caught occasional glimpses of lighted windows through the shrubbery. "The house is at the other end of the garden," remarked the man. "As you see, the windows of the first and second floors are lighted. Madame de Carouge and Madame Stenay are probably upstairs; but Philippe, I am almost certain, is in the little room on the ground floor. At all events, I will call Madame Stenay if we don't find her as we go in.

They were now only a few steps from the house. "Ah, I was right," continued the count's messenger. "Philippe is alone, as you see, mademoiselle. His reverie does not seem to be a pleasant one by any means. We shall give him an agreeable surprise."

Through the window, and by the light of two large lamps, Camille could distinctly see Philippe sitting at the table with his bowed head resting on his hands. He did not appear to have heard the footsteps of his betrothed and her companion, although the gravel creaked noisily under their tread, and the glass door of the room was partially open.

"You can see that I have only told you the truth, mademoiselle," added the man, raising his voice a little. "The poor fellow is counting the minutes by his watch, which lies there on the table near him; for he is determined to keep his word, and kill himself if you do not come. Look, his revolver is there on the cloth beside him." Camille could not speak. Her heart throbbed almost to bursting, and it was only by a violent effort that she could keep from fainting. "Let us go in. It is time," said her guide, in a still louder tone.

These words must also have failed to reach the ears of M. de Charny, for, instead of turning towards the door, he leaned back in his arm-chair, picked up his revolver, cocked it, and raised it slowly to his right temple. "Stop! Here I am!" cried the terrified girl, springing forward.

Her companion did not try to detain her, and this time M. de Charny must have heard distinctly, for he dropped the pistol on the table and hastened towards Mademoiselle Gerfaut, who sank back fainting in his arms. Catching her round the waist, he carried her to a sofa, where he knelt beside her, and found that she had completely lost consciousness. The messenger followed them, but made no offer of assistance, and said nothing. His eyes only spoke, and M. de Charny replied to their mute questioning by two significant gestures. He first pointed to the floor above, and then to the path by which Camille had come, emphasising this last sign by a movement of the hand that certainly said: "Go, as soon as you have executed my commission upstairs, and await my orders at the gate of the villa." Camille, still unconscious, was thus left alone with the count, who could think of no better way to revive her than to unfasten her dress, thus exposing her shoulders and bosom, on which the freshly healed wound was plainly visible. However, this did not suffice to restore

her, and the swoon was a prolonged one. "Where am I?" she murmured at last.

"You are in a friend's house, and you run no risk whatever," replied Madame de Carouge, who had just come quietly downstairs.

"No risk whatever, I assure you," repeated Philippe. "Am I not your betrothed? You have ceased to care for me, perhaps, but I still love you, and you have just saved my life, for I had sworn to kill myself if you refused to see me again. I bless you for listening to my prayer, and my happiness will be complete if you will allow me to prove to you that I am innocent of the infamous charges which, I am sure, have been made against me. You cannot believe them, or you would not be here."

"I came because I was assured that I should find Madame Stenay here," said Camille, beginning to regain her self-possession, and to realise the danger of her position. "Where is she? I wish to see her."

"Madame Stenay waited for you a long time, my dear child," said Madame de Carouge, "and left the house only a few moments ago. She has gone to your father's house to make one more attempt to see him. But what have you to fear? I am here, and I will not leave you. It was only upon this condition that I gave my consent for your interview with Monsieur de Charny to take place in my house." Camille did not reply. She had just discovered that her neck and shoulders were bare, and blushing with shame she hastily drew her dress together and buttoned it.

"It was I who did that," continued Madame de Carouge. "It was absolutely necessary, for you were gasping for breath. Besides, are you not going to marry Monsieur de Charny? Ah, I do not regret having wounded your modesty, for I now have the proof that my suspicions were not unfounded. So it is true that some of the wretches who are plotting to ruin your happiness have also tried to kill you! Was it your father's pupil who wounded you? The scoundrel who dared to try to pay his addresses to me, and whom I snubbed as he deserved—that Carnac, who wants to marry you to one of his own rank—to that insignificant clerk I once met in Monsieur Gerfaut's studio—that Monsieur Brunier, who has doubtless promised him a commission on your dowry, and who, seeing that you had escaped from their clutches—"

"You are mistaken, madame," interrupted Camille. "Monsieur Carnac is an honest man, and—"

"Then it must have been Fertugue, that penniless painter who wanted to marry you for your money—Madame Stenay told me so—and who, enraged by your preference for Monsieur de Charny, has revenged himself by slandering the count and trying to kill you."

"I repeat that you are mistaken. I was wounded by accident."

"By accident! Why, it was a knife thrust that you received!"

"No, madame," Camille hastily rejoined, "I was wounded by a sword-thrust which was not intended for me. My father was amusing himself by fencing in his studio. He was alone at the time, and being blind he did not know that he was directly in front of the door leading to my apartments. I unfortunately happened to enter the studio just as he was making a lunge, and the point of his sword pierced my breast."

"Your father!" exclaimed Madame de Carouge.

"Yes, madame, and it is quite unnecessary to speak of his grief and despair. He nearly died of grief."

"And you, too, narrowly escaped death," said Philippe, mournfully.

"And yet he was not to blame, not in the least to blame. It was the

strangest possible fatality. You had just left the studio, madame, and my father thought you were with me in my own room. It was the day you came to sit for your bust."

"He told you this story, and you believed it! But I know it to be false. I am the person Monsieur Gerfaut intended to kill. He was waiting behind the door for me, and if a desire to leave the house had not seized me he would have vented upon me the rage which that wretch Carnac had incited in his heart."

"What do you mean?"

"My poor child, you little suspect what has been going on around you. Certain persons have convinced your father that I am not only in league with Monsieur de Charny to deceive you but that I have committed the most atrocious crimes. You now see the result of all this. He so far forgot himself as to attack and dangerously wound his own child. The fact that the blow was intended for me makes no difference; he would be summoned before the assizes just the same if any one denounced him."

Camille turned very pale. She saw, now that it was too late, that she had done very wrong to defend Carnac and Fertugue against an absurd accusation when she could not do so without compromising her father. However, Philippe de Charny made haste to re-assure her. "No one will denounce him," he said, quietly. "Madame de Carouge will, I am sure, scorn to notice calumnies which cannot injure her, and I await your verdict with patient resignation. Speak plainly and frankly; I do not lack courage, and I would rather know my fate, whatever it may be, than continue to cherish false hopes."

"What do you wish me to say?" murmured Mademoiselle Gerfaut, deeply touched by this appeal. "Our marriage was decided upon. You seem to think it broken off. My father has said nothing to indicate that such is the case."

"Is it possible?"

"I am only telling the truth, I assure you. He has scarcely mentioned your name in my presence since the accident; but you must understand that I cannot conceal this interview from him. I do not regret having come, since I arrived in time to prevent you from taking your own life; but our interview has lasted long enough. By this time my father has certainly discovered my absence, and must be quite wild with anxiety. I must go at once. Call your friend. Where is he? He promised not to leave me."

"You are resolved to go!" exclaimed Philippe, "to abandon me just as I again begin to hope! Ah, you had better have left me to die. It was cruel of you to prolong my misery! Why do you not say frankly that you will not return, that I shall never see you again, and let me put an end to my suffering?"

"Why do you talk of dying when nothing prevents you from going with me to my father?"

"Your father would not consent to see me."

"But he will consent to see me," exclaimed the young girl, "and I promise you that I will compel him to grant you a hearing. You say that Monsieur Carnac is your enemy; that he has defamed you and accused Madame de Carouge of the most atrocious crimes. Well, Monsieur Carnac must still be at the house. You can vindicate yourself in his presence, and compel him to admit that he has been deceived by erroneous reports. Madame de Carouge can also vindicate herself if she will consent to accompany us."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," interrupted the vocalist, drily, "I am not at all anxious to vindicate myself. I despise my accusers, and if they venture to go too far I shall not hesitate to proclaim the fact that your father tried to assassinate me, but wounded you instead. You can repeat to him what I have said. That is all I ask of you, and I do not intend to meddle any further with your love affairs."

Having said this, Madame de Carouge walked haughtily from the room, and Camille was left alone with M. de Charny. The poor girl now realised the full extent of the imprudence of which she had been guilty. Madame Stenay was not there; those who were to protect her had successively disappeared, and she was now at the mercy of a man who was, so she supposed, nearly frantic with despair, and whom she had not ceased to love, although his conduct began to appear incomprehensible to her. Seized with a sudden sensation of fear, she involuntarily stepped towards the partially open door that led into the garden. "Let me pass," she said to Philippe, who attempted to intercept her.

"You shall not go until you have heard me," replied the count.

"What do you want?" faltered Camille, more and more alarmed.

"To tell you that I have borne this state of things long enough. I thought of killing myself, but I must have been mad, for if I were dead you would marry that Marcel Brunier, who has set upon me these hounds whom I shall punish as they deserve. I will live, and marry you."

"Not without my father's consent."

"Your father has encouraged and befriended my enemies; he has tried to kill you, and no longer has any authority over you or over me. We can no longer trust him. I may surely be forgiven for placing you in a position where you can keep your promise. You were free when you plighted me your troth. Were we not about to start for Smyrna? Were not all the preparations made for our departure? Ah, well then, let us start. What does it matter whether we are married before one of the mayors of Paris, or one of the French consuls? My uncle is still living. He will take the place of the father who well-nigh killed you."

"Do you dare to insult my father?"

"He has certainly insulted *me* by closing his doors against me, after accepting me as his son-in-law. Besides, I love you, and no one shall prevent me from claiming you as my wife. Do not drive me to desperation. I swear to respect you if you will consent to accompany me."

"To accompany you where?" faltered Camille, who was on the verge of fainting.

"To the East. I am ready. We will start in an hour. To-morrow we will reach Marseilles, from which port we will embark to-morrow evening."

"Rather death!"

"So you defy me. Then take the consequences," cried M. de Charny, springing forward.

The imminence of her danger suggested a means of salvation to Camille. Seizing the revolver, which the count had thrown upon the table after his well-played scene as a despairing lover, she put it to her breast, and said, resolutely: "If you come one step nearer, I will kill myself."

She was very pale, but she did not tremble, and her eyes flashed fire. Philippe de Charny paused. He saw that this was no mere threat, and that Mademoiselle Gerfaud really preferred death to dishonour. "Let me pass," she said, boldly.

He complied, intending to rush after her and disarm her as soon as she

reached the garden. But just then a sound made him start. Over the gravel there resounded the tread of two men, and as the count paused to listen he heard a mocking voice say: "Go on ahead, Monsieur Auguste, and don't try to play any tricks on me, for if you do I will certainly put a bullet into your head."

M. de Charny instantly recognised the voice as Fertugue's; Camille, on the contrary, thought it was that of some new enemy, and kept the revolver against her breast, her finger upon the trigger. The count was furious, but he did not move. Surprise and anger held him spellbound, while his messenger, who now stepped reluctantly into the lighted room, closely followed by Fertugue, stood the picture of misery and confusion.

"Here I am, mademoiselle!" cried Fertugue. "I have come to take you back to your father, who is nearly frantic with anxiety."

The lamplight now fell full upon the face of the new-comer. Camille uttered a cry of joy and sprang to the side of this unlooked-for champion. M. de Charny made no further attempt to detain her; but folding his arms he asked haughtily: "By what right do you intrude here, sir?"

"By what right?" repeated Fertugue, ironically. "By the right of any honourable man to protect an innocent girl who has been basely entrapped by a villain." And as the count sprang forward as if to attack him, he continued: "Stay where you are, or I will kill you as I would a dog. So you tried to compromise Mademoiselle Gerfaut in order to compel her to marry you! You succeeded in decoying her to the house of the vile woman who has repeatedly served as your accomplice, with the intention of detaining her there by force. Thank God, I arrived in time. Oh, don't attempt to deny it! Auguste, your accomplice, has confessed all. Tomorrow you will hear from me. This evening I would advise you to keep quiet, for if you attempt to molest me I will blow your brains out without the slightest compunctions of conscience. Come, mademoiselle, the knave who enticed you from your home shall accompany us back. Auguste, walk on ahead."

Auguste instantly obeyed, without saying a word to M. de Charny, for he had a wholesome fear of firearms. Camille was so unnerved that she could scarcely stand. Fertugue gently took the weapon she still held away from her. Before stepping out into the darkness the painter turned to the count, and said: "I forbid you to follow us; I forbid it under penalty of death. Your accomplice is waiting for you. Rejoin her, and try to make the necessary arrangements with her to escape before the police come to arrest you both."

"I have no fears of that," replied, Philippe, defiantly. "I shall expect to see you to-morrow at noon at the club, where we can decide upon the time and place of a hostile meeting. I shall have a chance of finding out how much courage you and your friends possess. In the meantime, if you dare to make the absurd complaint with which you threaten me, I, in my turn, shall inform the authorities that Monsieur Gerfaut attempted to murder his daughter; and his daughter cannot deny it, for she herself just told me so, and I have seen the wound."

Fertugue was not prepared for this direct attack, and knew not how to parry it. He looked at Camille, and reading a confirmation of this assertion in her agitated face, he decided not to take a decisive stand until after he had consulted Gerfaut. "Very well, sir, I will give you until to-morrow," he replied. "We will see which of us fails to keep the appointment."

It was a concession ; but it had at least one advantage, it saved Camille and her protector from any immediate danger, for the count, now sure of another respite, no longer had any interest in preventing their departure.

The garden gate was reached in safety, Auguste, who was overwhelmed with mortification and dismay, leading the way. Once he muttered between his teeth : " And to cap the climax, my fifteen thousand francs are gone for ever. I shall lose every farthing of my money."

Softly as he spoke, Fertugue overheard the remark. " You will only get what you deserve if you do," he said. " In fact, if you don't walk straight after this, you will fare even worse. You must know something about the penal code, and the consequences of assisting in the abduction of a minor."

" I really hope that you will not denounce me, Monsieur Fertugue," said Auguste, earnestly. " In the first place, I didn't really know what that rascally count was up to ; besides, I have just done you a valuable service, for if it hadn't been for me you would never have found mademoiselle."

" That is very possible, but I make you no promises. What I do will depend entirely upon how you behave yourself. If you say a word about this affair to any one, I won't spare you."

" There is no danger of my talking. I have no reason to boast."

" But that is not enough. You are to get up on the box beside the coachman and see that mademoiselle and I are driven with all possible speed to No. 99 Boulevard des Batignolles. If you serve me faithfully, I may try to devise some way to indemnify you for your loss."

" Ah, if you would only do that, Monsieur Fertugue, I could never be sufficiently grateful to you. You may rest assured that I would much rather work for you than for that scoundrel, who has defrauded me of my hard-earned money."

The carriage was still in waiting. Auguste, now cheered by a hope of recovering his money, made haste to open the door, and then clambered upon the box. The vehicle started off. Camille, overcome with emotion, sank back in a corner, where she remained silent and motionless. Fertugue felt that this was no time to censure her for her imprudence, and that it would be cruel to ask her what had occurred. He was satisfied that poor Camille had seen and heard enough to understand her suitor's real character, so he tried to divert her thoughts by saying cheerfully, almost gaily : " I must tell you, mademoiselle, the lucky chance by which I discovered where you were. I have been haunting the streets of Neuilly more than a week, for reasons best known to myself ; and I had just completed my daily round, and was about to return to Paris, when I found myself face to face with one of the waiters employed at a club I belong to. I recognised him instantly, although he was not in livery ; I also recognised the carriage in which we are now seated. It is a brougham hired by the month, which is at the disposal of the members of the club. Auguste, for that is the waiter's name, was just getting into it. The happy thought of asking him what he was doing here occurred to me. He had already told me about some money he had lent to Monsieur de Charry, money, which the count, so he said, would only refund after his marriage with a certain wealthy heiress. Knowing all this, I had no difficulty in extorting the truth from him. He told me that Monsieur de Charry had asked for his assistance in a scheme he had concocted. He, Auguste, was to dress like a respectable citizen, and devise some way of delivering a

letter to you, and inducing you to accompany him to that villa. By doing this, Auguste hoped to ensure the payment of his fifteen thousand francs. He is not wanting in intelligence, and talks remarkably well. The part suited him, and he probably played it well."

"Too well," said Camille, huskily.

"The rest scarcely requires an explanation," continued Fertugue, slightly hesitating. "The position in which you were placed seemed to me exceedingly dangerous; and I felt it my duty to rescue you from it. I ordered Auguste to conduct me where you were. He did not consent with a very good grace, but I had a revolver in my pocket. The mere sight of that induced him to act as my guide, and I think I had the good fortune to arrive just in time."

Fertugue said no more, and Camille was infinitely grateful to him for his consideration. The carriage was moving very swiftly, and would soon reach Gerfaut's door. Camille felt that she must thank her protector for restoring her to her father; and yet she did not know how to express her gratitude without making some allusion to the suitor whom she now hated and despised as much as she had formerly loved. Her companion perceived her embarrassment, and broke the ice by asking a question which seemed well nigh unavoidable. "May I venture to inquire if it is true that you told Monsieur de Charny about the unfortunate mistake of which you were the victim?"

"I told him that my father wounded me unintentionally," replied Camille, "and I am sure of it, though Madame de Carouge declares that the sword thrust was intended for her. She even threatens to denounce my father."

"Then she was there when you reached the villa?"

"No; I fainted on seeing Monsieur de Charny snatch up a pistol as if he meant to commit suicide, and when I regained consciousness I found Madame de Carouge beside me."

"So you were caught by the comedy they had rehearsed in advance! They were in league, and they always will be. But they will give no one any trouble after to-morrow. Monsieur de Charny has made an appointment with me, but he will not keep it. His object is merely to gain time; and I am satisfied that he will leave Paris to-night or to-morrow morning, never to return. He is deeply in debt; even his furniture has been seized. I say nothing of his past, nor of his intimacy with a creature of the vilest kind, but——"

"It is true, then?" murmured the poor girl, as the tears rushed to her eyes. "And yet she visited Madame Stenay, and Madame Stenay visited her," she added, wondering.

Fertugue read what was passing in her mind, and intuitively felt that she suspected him of interested motives. He had at one time paid her marked attention, and she doubtless remembered it. Deeming it advisable to explain the situation clearly, he rejoined: "I am inclined to think that Madame Stenay has been more or less of a dupe. Still, she is greatly to blame for having blindly entered into an intimacy with an abandoned woman, and a man who has foully dishonoured the name he bears. If, when I first met you at Madame Stenay's house, I had known what I know now, I should have warned you of the danger you incurred. You might have imputed this warning to jealousy on my part, and I confess that it grieved me deeply to see you prefer Count de Charny to me; but I am now consoled, although I feel for you a most sincere and respectful friend."

ship. You constantly meet a young man who loves you passionately, though he dares not tell you so, but who is worthy of being your husband, for he possesses every quality, and not a single bad trait so far as I know. His sister is your most intimate friend. Need I name him?" Camille, being too much agitated to reply, Fertugue continued, boldly: "Marcel Brunier is the husband for you, mademoiselle. Carnac fondly cherishes the hope of marrying Annette Brunier, who would not only make him happy, but ensure her own happiness by accepting him. It is to him that you are indebted for your escape from the trap that has been set for you. But for him I should never have known the real character of Madame de Carouge and her accomplice; and I should not have rescued you from their clutches. I beg you will excuse my plain speaking. But here we are at your door."

The carriage stopped, and Auguste sprang down from the box to open the door. "You will now take yourself off," Fertugue said to him, in a tone that admitted of no reply. "I have no further need of you. Decamp, but look out for yourself if you say a word!"

Carnac was standing on the threshold, and when he perceived Camille he gave vent to his joy in the most exuberant manner. But Fertugue cut these demonstrations short, by asking, "Where is Monsieur Gerfaut?"

"In his own room," replied Carnac. "It was only with great difficulty that I prevented him from flinging himself out of the window. He is calmer now; but mademoiselle came none too soon."

"I will go to him at once," said Camille. "I thank you, gentlemen," she added, offering a hand to each of the friends, as if to indicate to them that she wished to be alone with her father.

They understood her. When Fertugue saw her safe inside the house, he walked away with Carnac, who exclaimed, "Where the deuce did you find her? I was afraid that she had started for Smyrna with that scoundrel."

Fertugue at once recounted the incidents of the rescue, and added, "She knows now what to think of that handsome scoundrel with whom she was so infatuated. I assure you that no further danger need be apprehended, so far as she is concerned. I even took advantage of the opportunity to advise her to marry Marcel Brunier. She did not say no; but remember the proverb: 'Strike while the iron is hot.' If I were in your place, I would at once call on the Bruniers, tell them all that has occurred, and advise them to make overtures to Monsieur Gerfaut at once. I am satisfied that they would not be unfavourably received, even by the daughter."

"But there is Charny, who is capable of anything?"

"Charny is completely cowed. He knows that both the girl and the dowry are lost, irretrievably lost. He threatened to denounce Gerfaut, and made an appointment with me for to-morrow at noon at the club, to conclude the necessary arrangements for a duel. I am convinced, however, that he is only trying to gain time, and that he will decamp this very night with Margot."

"Then you do not intend to keep the appointment?"

"I scarcely know yet. At first, I thought of consulting Gerfaut; but it seemed best to leave the father and daughter alone together. I am inclined to think now that I shall go to the club-house at the appointed hour."

"Yes, we shall see if Charny turns up or not. I and Buzançais will

go with you. You can meet us at noon, near the door of the club-house. Now I shall go to see Marcel Brunier ; I am sure of finding him and his sister at home, as this is their dinner-hour."

"Well, dine with them, and take them to see Gerfaut afterwards."

"He would not see them. He must need rest after this ordeal, and, even if he is not in bed, he is not able to see visitors."

"You are right, perhaps ; nevertheless, I think I will make an attempt to see him at once. He will hardly refuse to talk with a person who has just restored his daughter to him. I will leave you now, and go and prepare Gerfaut for a visit from you and the Bruniers, between seven and eight this evening. You, my friend, had better hasten to the Rue Labat, but mind you lose no time there. Two marriages to arrange, and four consents to extort—that is the programme ; and it must be carried out this evening—or never."

## X.

CARNAC followed his friend's advice. He went straight to the Rue Labat, where, as he had predicted, he found the Bruniers at dinner. They cordially invited him to take pot-luck with them, and he promptly accepted the invitation. He had not set foot in the house since the memorable day when he had pursued Plantin over the housetops, and that startling episode had interrupted a conversation in which our student of nature was deeply interested. There had resulted from it, however, a sort of alliance against M. de Charny and Margot ; inasmuch as Mademoiselle Annette had replied : "Cure my friend Camille of her infatuation for this man, by showing him to her in his true colours, and afterwards we will see."

The moment had now come to remind her of these words, to which Marcel had listened without protest, and to inform both of them of the victory won over Mademoiselle Gerfaut's enemies. Everything promised well. He was received with the utmost cordiality, especially by Annette, and Marcel seemed rather less gloomy than usual. Still, Carnac did not broach the object of his call. An unconquerable timidity paralysed his tongue. Again and again, he repeated to himself the sage maxim : "Heaven helps those who help themselves," and reminded himself that Fertugue had done enough, and that it was now his, Carnac's, turn to act. Nevertheless, the words would not come. He did not know where to begin. The dinner was fast drawing to a close. They had already reached the dessert, and Annette seemed to take a mischievous pleasure in preventing the conversation from getting beyond common-places. She talked of the long-planned but always-deferred visit to the Louvre ; she teased Carnac about the patronage he had received from pork butchers, and the masterpieces he had executed in lard ; and whenever he attempted to broach the subject nearest his heart she began to discuss the most trivial topics with the greatest apparent interest. So persistent was she, that Camille Gerfaut's name had not been mentioned, although Carnac had had it on his lips a hundred times. He had remarked on entering that he came on important business ; but Mademoiselle Brunier had interrupted him by compelling him to take a seat at the table, and the poor fellow was obliged to wait for chance to furnish him with the much-desired opportunity to venture an allusion to his own hopes, and to Marcel's chances as a suitor for the hand of Camille.

"Do you know that my fame as a successful maker of artificial flowers is becoming quite enviable?" asked Annette, suddenly. "A fashionable lady has called here twice to make inquiries about me, and to leave an order. I was not at home either time, but she told the house porter that she would call again very soon, and inquired at what hour she would be most likely to find me in."

"Did the porter tell her?"

"Certainly. Our porter is a very shrewd fellow, and understanding from her that she had a very handsome order to give, he lost no time in informing her that I only went out in the afternoon at about three o'clock, and always returned in time for dinner. I have been expecting her all day, but have not seen her. I am satisfied, however, that she will call to-morrow."

"I hope you will not see her," said Carnac, quickly, "for I am sure that this pretended lady is Margot."

"And who is Margot, pray? It seems to me that I have heard you mention this person before."

"She is the adventuress who now styles herself Madame de Carouge," replied Carnac. "Is it possible that you have forgotten what I told you the day her accomplice fell on your balcony?"

"Oh, yes! I recollect now; but surely you must be mistaken. Madame de Carouge knows me, and if she wished to see me it would not be necessary for her to make a pretext of giving an order—she would simply call on me, like anyone else."

"You do not know what has occurred. I came here to tell you, and it is time for me to explain. Give me your attention for a moment. The man who was killed by falling from the roof of your house was the paid agent of Madame de Carouge, and he had assisted her in the murder of a woman who was a stumbling-block in Monsieur de Charny's way; moreover, it was Madame de Carouge who blinded Monsieur Gerfaut by throwing vitriol in his face. She wanted Monsieur de Charny to marry Mademoiselle Gerfaut. They intended to share her dowry and afterwards murder her. But they have been baffled by the efforts of Fertugue, Dr. Buzançais, and myself. You yourself, Marcel, have been an obstacle to their plans. They discovered that you loved Camille, and that you were a formidable rival."

"They are at least partially mistaken. I love the young lady, but she does not love me, nor will she ever love me."

"It is you who are mistaken. Mademoiselle Gerfaut has learned to-day the real character of this nobleman, who dazzled her for a time with his fine manners, and deceived her by his falsehoods. It is not necessary for me to mention the danger she but narrowly escaped, but I assure you, upon my honour, that she now cordially despises and hates Monsieur de Charny, and that she will never see him again."

"So much the better for her and for her father!"

"So much the better for you, too; for she liked you very much even before she was cured of her infatuation, and now there is nothing to prevent you from winning her if you choose. Fertugue has gone to prepare Gerfaut and his daughter for a visit from you. They are expecting us this evening. It was to announce this good news that I came."

"And you kept it to yourself all this time?" cried Annette.

"Alas! mademoiselle, you seemed determined to keep me from speaking. Besides, I dared not,"

"Though you came only for that," said Annette, with a glance that awakened fresh hope and courage in Carnac's heart.

"No," he replied, with evident emotion, "I confess that I came to beg for an answer to the question I ventured to ask of you about three weeks ago."

"It is strange that I don't remember it," replied the girl, smiling mischievously. "To what do you allude?"

"To the love you have inspired in my heart," was our student of nature's prompt reply. Once fairly started, even the most timid become eloquent, and Carnac straightway burst into an ardent declaration. He reminded Annette of the encouraging words which she had allowed to escape her, and concluded by saying: "That time has now come, mademoiselle. Your friend is delivered from her enemies, and I am almost certain that she will marry your brother. Now will you not make me happy, if you think I deserve a reward for my labours?"

"Take care!" said Annette, gaily. "It sounds very much as if you were claiming payment of a promissory note. I don't refuse to pay my debts, but this is really too soon. I must wait until Marcel has seen Camille."

"Do you advise me to go to see her?" asked Marcel, eagerly.

"Yes, certainly; and the sooner the better, as Monsieur Carnac says she is expecting you; he certainly would not deceive us at a time like this. Let us begin by ensuring your happiness, brother. Ours is in our own hands, and we will give our attention to it afterwards—to-morrow, perhaps." Carnac tried to kiss her hand, but she checked him, saying, gaily: "You are too hasty, always too hasty. Besides, old-fashioned manners don't suit me. If you kiss me at all, it must be heartily, upon both cheeks. Oh! not now, by-and-by, when our marriage is a settled thing."

Carnac was speechless with joy; but Marcel, although the most unselfish of brothers, was too much engrossed by the hopes these revelations had awakened to be particularly alive to what was going on around him. "You, my dear Marcel, must go to Monsieur Gervaut's at once, since our friend here is kind enough to accompany you," said Annette.

"Will you not go with us?"

"No, I should only be in the way. Camille would feel much more embarrassed if she were compelled to confess her sentiments and her misdeeds before me. Besides, you know very well that I cannot leave home this evening. I am expecting some one."

"The lady who promised to give you an order?" asked Carnac.

"No, sir; I forgot to tell you, if she calls again, it will be in the morning, for the porter told her that after dinner I almost invariably go out at about eight o'clock, with my brother, and it is now half-past eight. I don't mind adding that the person I expect is Jeanne Plantin."

"Jeanne Plantin! the widow of that wretch who——"

"The same. I certainly have a right to assist her if I like. I have succeeded in obtaining some work for the poor woman from a firm which will pay her liberally. She is to bring me this evening the first piece of work entrusted to her, upon my recommendation, and I am authorised to pay her for it. I am much surprised that she is not here before this. She knows my rooms, and must have seen the light. It is true, however, that she is very timid, and that the porter treated her rather uncivilly the other day, because she was so shabbily dressed. I scolded him well for it, I assure you! But she was not present at the time, and perhaps

she does not dare to come in; so send her up, if you see anything of her down stairs."

"Then we are to go to Monsieur Gerfaut's without you?" inquired Marcel.

"Certainly. Have I not explained my reasons fully? But you ought to have started long ago. Don't you see that Monsieur Carnac is becoming impatient?"

"By no means, I assure you, mademoiselle," protested the student of nature, eagerly. "When I am with you——"

"You like to stay there. That is very kind of you, I am sure; but I hope that you also like to please me, and in that case you will take my brother away with you without further delay. Monsieur Gerfaut must not be kept waiting." And rising, Annette added: "I don't forbid your returning with Marcel, that is, unless you keep him out too late. I will sit up for you until midnight."

Carnac was forced to obey, especially as Marcel said, brusquely: "Come, I'm ready!"

"Good luck to you!" cried Annette. "I am glad you have made up your minds to go at last. What cowards you men are, after all! It is very fortunate that I have courage enough for two." Then without giving them any time to retort, she pushed them both into the ante-room and handed them their hats. "Go!" she exclaimed, opening the door; "go and don't forget that I am impatient to know my fate."

These words made Carnac's heart throb more rapidly. "She said 'my fate,'" he thought. "So she must hope that her marriage with me will follow that of her brother and Camille. She loves me, then. Heaven grant that Fertugue was not mistaken about the result of our visit. I am afraid that Marcel will not plead his cause very well. Never mind. I shall be there to help him. Besides, it is something that he has consented to take the step; though it costs him a terrible effort, as is only too evident."

In fact, Marcel did not look at all like a lover who is about to appear before his adored one. He was as pale as a prisoner who is about to listen to a verdict which he knows to be unfavourable. "Courage!" whispered Carnac, as they descended the stairs together, "Fertugue hasn't the slightest doubt of your success." But Marcel had relapsed into a gloomy silence, and the young sculptor dared say no more.

On reaching the first landing below, they heard the footsteps of some one coming up, and as the staircase was narrow, they stopped to let the person pass. This person proved to be Jeanne Plantin. "Ah!" said Carnac, kindly, "Mademoiselle Brunier was just wondering why you did not come. But what is the matter? You seem to be frightened, or is it merely because you have come upstairs so fast that you are quite out of breath?"

"No, it isn't that, but I just saw——" Jeanne did not finish the sentence, but paused, as if in doubt, on perceiving Marcel.

"You can speak freely," said Carnac. "This is Mademoiselle Brunier's brother. What did you see to frighten you so?"

"I'm not frightened exactly, but just as I approached the house I saw a lady go in. I followed her in without her noticing me, and was just behind her when she opened the door of the porter's room. I heard her ask him if Monsieur and Mademoiselle Brunier were at home, and the porter replied: 'Yes, they are, but make haste, for I think they are going out. It is half-past eight now.'"

"You must be very easily frightened if such a trifle as that alarmed you," said Carnac, shrugging his shoulders.

"No, but the lady answered, 'Then I will not disturb them, but will call a little earlier to-morrow evening.' Well, I passed on, without saying anything to the porter, but before I began to climb the stairs, I turned, without really knowing why, and saw that, instead of going out into the street again, the lady had paused at the end of the hall—indeed, it seemed to me that she was hiding between the door and the wall. I am not at all sure, however, as the hall is so dimly lighted."

"If you are not sure of it, you are probably mistaken."

"I don't think I am, sir, and the idea that she might be watching for mademoiselle or her brother occurred to me, for it is certainly strange that she did not go up stairs."

"Did you see the lady's face?" inquired Carnac.

"No, her back was turned towards me. I only noticed that she was handsomely dressed, with a rich fur-lined mantle."

"What if it were Margot?" murmured Carnac. "You did well to warn me," he added, turning to Jeanne.

"I will do more if you wish. If this person has a spite against any one, it is certainly not against me, so I will go down ahead of you and pass out into the street, pausing just outside the door. When you come in sight I will raise my hand to warn you if she is there, or call out to you, and when she finds that there is some one near the door, she won't dare to move."

"And we will ask her why she is playing hide-and-seek in the hall of a respectable house," added Carnac. "Yours is not a bad idea, Jeanne," he continued. "You have a bundle there, I see. It will be in your way. Leave it here, and run down-stairs as fast as you can. We will follow leisurely. But beware of imprudence, and don't venture too near the woman. She is a hard customer, and might injure you in some way."

"Oh, I won't go near her," replied Jeanne. "I have good eyes, and I can easily see if she is in the corner behind the door as I pass by. I will pretend not to be looking that way, and pass straight by. Don't forget my signal."

And laying her bundle on the stairs, she ran lightly but rapidly down stairs. Marcel Brunier had listened to the conversation with the utmost indifference. "The woman is mad," he remarked.

"Not so mad as you think, perhaps. If I am not very much mistaken we have to deal with Margot. I am certain that she is the person who previously called to inquire at what hour Mademoiselle Annette went out; and if she has now returned, it is only because she is intending some fresh outrage against you, against all who have been instrumental in breaking off the count's marriage. She is not aware that I am here, but she won't be sorry to wreak her vengeance upon me as well, for she knows that the failure of her plans is due in a great measure to me."

"But there are two of us. I don't see that there is any great danger to be apprehended, as our enemy is only a woman, after all."

"Yes, but an exceedingly desperate and unscrupulous woman. She will not shrink from anything, as she has already proved. We had better keep our eyes open."

They resumed the descent of the stairs, Carnac leading the way, for he meant to have his share of the danger, and also of the glory, in case of

an attack. "How fortunate that Mademoiselle Annette decided not to come!" he thought. "By remaining at home she risks nothing, and if we have a tussle with Margot she would be very much in our way. Heaven grant that she won't open the door if the creature should try to gain admission after our departure! I think we had better go back and warn her before we leave, for Jeanne Plantin may be mistaken, and Margot may have left the house with the intention of returning; in that case she is probably hiding in the street instead of behind the door."

Carnac deemed it advisable not to impart these reflections to Marcel, whose mind was engrossed with very different thoughts. They descended to the hall without exchanging another word. The front door was on the right-hand side; the porter's room on the left. They could see him enjoying a quiet game of lotto with his family. Carnac had thought of questioning him about the lady who had just asked for Annette; but the time would have been badly chosen.

The passage leading to the front door was not very wide. Three persons would have found it difficult to walk abreast there; but it was of some length. Marcel and Carnac entered it side by side. There was a gas-burner at each end; but midway it was comparatively dark, so that it was difficult for a person standing at the door to discern anybody coming down the hall. Carnac, on the contrary, could distinctly see Jeanne Plantin, standing on the door-step, with her arm uplifted in the air. It was the signal agreed upon. The suspected person was there, concealed behind the door, but she did not move. She was, doubtless, waiting for them to come near enough for her to recognise them. Carnac gave Marcel a warning nudge, to put him on his guard against any sudden attack, and continued to advance. It seemed to him that the door was slowly swinging away from the wall, and at the same instant he saw Jeanne slip from the step outside into the hall. She evidently intended to take part in the encounter, and her help was certainly not to be despised.

Carnac tried to pass out first, but his friend hastily stepped by him. In another instant the full glare of the gaslight fell on his face, and simultaneously a tall woman emerged from the place of concealment and darted towards him. "You first," she hissed, through her set teeth. At the same time she swung back her right arm, as a person does when he wishes to hurl a missile. But at that moment Jeanne, who was close behind her, seized her arm, and giving it a sudden jerk, directed the missile upon the woman herself. A despairing shriek rose above the sound of shattered glass. The woman had just dropped a phial, and raising her hands to her face she retreated towards the door; but Jeanne, who was standing behind her, barred her passage, and Carnac seized her by the wrists. "Let me alone! let me alone!" she cried, struggling frantically.

Carnac at once recognised the voice of Margot. Then, and then only, he understood what had occurred. She had once more resorted to her old weapon; and the vitriol she had intended for others had gone straight into her own face. Jeanne Plantin, by thus saving Marcel, Annette's brother and Camille's lover, had paid her debt of gratitude to her two benefactresses. Margot certainly deserved no pity; but she was, perhaps, blind; at all events she must be suffering terribly. Carnac really lacked the courage to arrest her; and even felt strongly tempted to allow her to depart. "Cowards! cowards!" she cried. "Oh, how I suffer."

As Marcel, touched by her moans, approached her, she made the same movement with her left hand that she had previously made with her right; but, as if suddenly changing her mind, she cried out, in a voice hoarse with agony: "Don't touch me, I say! don't touch me!"

Instead of trying to leave the house, she then tottered towards the end of the passage, and Carnac and Marcel, stupefied with amazement, stepped aside, and allowed her to grope her way to the door of the porter's room. That functionary had condescended to pause in his game of lotto, and now came to see what was the matter. "Make way," cried the suffering woman, pushing him aside.

The porter's wife and children recoiled in terror on beholding Margot's face, and hastily took refuge in their adjoining bed-chamber. Carnac, however, had followed the adventuress. "A looking-glass! is there a looking-glass here!" she cried.

There was one, and she hastened to it and looked at herself. The vitriol had destroyed only one of her eyes, but it had burned her left cheek, her nose, and all the lower part of her face; and the frightfully swollen flesh looked as if it had been scarred with a red-hot iron. The beautiful Marguerite had become frightful to gaze upon. She turned to Carnac, and he then perceived for the first time that she had something in her left hand. It was a vial like that she had just thrown, and it was not difficult to guess its contents. Carnac watched her closely, in order to guard against any possible attack; but the precaution was unnecessary.

"You are afraid," she said, grinding her teeth. "You need not be. If I served you as I intended to serve your sweetheart and her brother I shouldn't have poison enough left to kill myself with, and I don't want to live disfigured like this. Marry your Annette, and marry Camille to your idiot of a friend. Philippe de Charny will avenge me; he has already avenged me, for Fertugue came too late. Do you understand me? That doll-faced girl had already——"

Carnac, furious with anger, rushed forward to silence her, even at the risk of receiving the bottle of vitriol full in his face; but she raised the vial to her lips. Her agony, as she swallowed the poison, was so great, however, that she was unable to empty the vial, and she fell back, throwing at Carnac what remained of the liquid. But she was no longer in a condition to aim correctly, and Gerfaut's pupil escaped with a few burns on his hands. "A physician, quick!" said the young sculptor, pushing the porter towards the door.

The wretched woman now lay writhing upon the floor in frightful agony. Marcel and Jeanne had remained in the hall, where Carnac now joined them. "You, my dear friend," he said, addressing Marcel, "had better go upstairs to your sister. I no longer feel like going to Gerfaut's; besides, some one must remain here to explain matters to the commissary of police. You, Jeanne, had better return home at once. I will take good care to prevent you from being mixed up in the matter."

## XI.

THE clocks of Paris had just struck twelve, when Jean Carnac, accompanied by Buzançais, met Fertugue near the door of the famous club-house. The painter greeted them rather ungraciously. "Do you know," he said,

curtly, "that I waited for you at Gerfaut's house until eleven o'clock last evening, and went away without seeing either you or Monsieur Brunier. If your friend expects to advance his love affairs by hiding himself, he is very much mistaken."

"It was no fault of ours that we did not come, nor has there been much time lost. We are delivered now from the worst of our enemies—Margot with the scar is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes. Madame de Carouge attempted to treat Marcel and her sister as she had treated poor Gerfaut. She provided herself with two bottles of vitriol, and stationed herself in the hall of their house to wait for them."

"The wretch!" exclaimed Fertugue, in horror.

Carnac then duly recounted the events of the previous evening, and added: "Margot died while she was on her way to the hospital. I sent for the commissary of police myself, and I venture to say that I managed this difficult matter with great prudence and tact. I began by sending away the woman who had saved us, and then sent Monsieur Brunier up to his sister. The porter had not seen what took place in the hall, and so understood nothing of the affair."

"But Margot must have spoken before she died?"

"Yes; she said that Philippe had already avenged her, as you reached Neuilly too late to save Camille's honour."

"She lied. I found Mademoiselle Gerfaut defying the scoundrel, revolver in hand."

"I was satisfied, at the time, that the assertion was false," replied Carnac. "Fortunately, when the officers reached the house, she was too far gone to speak."

"But the commissary must have questioned you afterwards?"

"Yes, but only for form's sake. I described the scene exactly as it had occurred, without making any comments or entering into any explanation. It was his business to discover why the woman had committed suicide after trying to throw the vitriol in my face—for I told him it was at me that she aimed it. I did this to prevent the Bruniers and Jeanne Plantin—whom the porter had not seen—from being mixed up in the affair. It was likewise the commissary's business to find out who the dead woman was, so I did not volunteer the information."

"Were there no cards nor letters found upon her person?"

"They found bonds and bank-notes to the amount of about a hundred thousand francs secreted in her bosom. It is more than probable that this is all that remains of the amount shown to Gerfaut's notary last month. The rest has been lost at the gaming-table by Charny. That is why the pair were so anxious to succeed in their plot. They needed Camille's dowry to repair these losses."

"I suspected as much, you recollect. But to return to Margot. Her body will be carried to the Morgue, where it will certainly be identified."

"Her face is so terribly disfigured that recognition seems to me impossible. Charny probably fled last night, as you predicted. I feel so sure of it, that my object in coming here to meet you was more to apprise you of the events of the past night than anything else."

"You are very much mistaken, my dear fellow. Charny has not left Paris; on the contrary, he is waiting for us at the club. I have made inquiries, and I find that he arrived at about ten o'clock, and he has not left since. I did not want to see him until after I had talked with you;

and I was equally anxious that he should not escape me. So I have been standing guard here in the cold for more than twenty minutes."

"Your ordeal is ended now. Let us go in at once. But as we walk along, tell me how your evening with Gerfaut passed off."

"In the most satisfactory manner. Mademoiselle Camille had told her father everything, and he was, of course, furiously angry with the villain whom he had so narrowly escaped having for a son-in-law. He will be inexpressibly grateful to any one who will slay the reptile. Mademoiselle Gerfaut is much calmer, but I assure you that she is completely cured of her love for Philippe."

"Did you say anything to her about Marcel Brunier?"

"Yes, and I have the pleasure of announcing to you that he will be graciously received when he ventures to present himself. On the whole, I think it was as well that he did not come last evening, but he must not defer his visit too long."

"I saw him this morning, and he is only waiting for a word from me to go with his sister to Monsieur Gerfaut's. But speaking of Monsieur de Charny, how dares he come to the club after all that occurred yesterday? and what are we to say to him?"

"Under the circumstances, I certainly hope that we are not going to engage in a duel with him," said Buzançais, who now spoke for the first time.

"I haven't the slightest desire to do so. He must not remain in Paris, and yet, as he has come to the rendezvous to-day, he has no intention of going away."

"Look!" exclaimed Fertugue, suddenly, "there is Auguste coming out. Perhaps he can give us some information. Let us question him." Accordingly he beckoned to the waiter, who promptly obeyed the rather imperious signal. "Is it true that the count is at the club?" inquired the painter.

"Yes, sir," replied Auguste. "He is in the fencing-hall taking a lesson with the master who comes every morning to practise with members of the club, and he and the count have now been fencing for nearly two hours. I think that the lesson is over, however, and that they are going to breakfast."

"Did the count say anything to you when he came in? You can speak freely before these gentlemen. They know what occurred at Neuilly."

"Well, I can confess that I have just spent a very uncomfortable quarter of an hour with Monsieur de Charny. He accused me of having betrayed him for money. You know very well that the charge is utterly false, for I did not receive a penny, and only yielded when I was compelled to do so by force. You had to put a pistol to my head before I would consent to do what you asked."

"You will be paid for your services, perhaps. That depends entirely upon yourself, however. If you serve us faithfully, and if you hold your tongue, you will be liberally rewarded."

"I shall never see the fifteen thousand francs I lent to that rascal, I'm sure; for he seems to be on his last legs, and to be meditating some desperate step. As long as he was on good terms with his old friend, I had some grounds for hope. He has spent hundreds of thousands of francs of her money; and she continued to give him enough to live upon, but she seems to have got tired of it at last and deserted him. At least he told me so, and he pretends that I am the cause of it, because I

betrayed him. It seems that last evening, after we left him, she went away, asking him to wait for her; and nothing has been seen of her since."

"And he has no idea what has become of her?"

"Not unless he lies most outrageously, though that is quite possible. But this much is certain, she took all the money with her, and there is very little probability of his ever seeing it again. I know that the butler handed the count, this morning, a bill of two hundred and fifty francs for choice wines sent to Madame de Carouge, and he told the butler to go to Neuilly and collect the money if he could. He did so, and found the house deserted. Madame de Carouge had fled! Charny won't linger long behind, in my opinion; and I have an idea that, if you wish to see him, you had better lose no time."

"You are sure, then, that he has not gone out?"

"If he had, you would certainly have seen him. There is only one door to the club. You will find him in the fencing-hall. It is in the basement, you know. But I assure you, sir, there is nothing to be gained by seeing him. Would you like to know what brought him to the club this morning? He came to try to borrow fifty louis from Cambron, who laughed in his face. He strongly thinks of striking the count's name off the list of members this very day. He is no fool, Cambron, and if he thought there was any possible chance of the count's getting on his feet again, as he had done so many times before, he wouldn't turn him out."

"I'm sure of that. But it isn't Charny's money I want. He owes me an explanation, and I am going to demand it of him in the presence of these gentlemen."

"An explanation of his conduct of yesterday? You certainly don't need that. But if you think of fighting him, remember that he is a capital swordsman."

"We will fight with pistols, then, if we fight at all," growled Buzançais.

"All this, of course, is no business of mine," replied Auguste; "but if I were in your place, gentlemen, I certainly wouldn't stake my life against the count's. I should simply go to the proper authorities and denounce him."

"I know my own business," said Fertugue. "Now leave us."

"I am going, sir, but allow me to remind you that you have promised me an indemnity, and if the count killed you in a duel——"

"He will not kill all three of us," interrupted Carnac, "and I have ten thousand francs that I don't know what to do with. You might as well have them as anybody, I suppose; so come to Gerfaut's house on the Boulevard des Batignolles to-morrow, and ask for Jean Carnac. Now go."

"Yes," continued Fertugue, "take yourself off. We have wasted too much time in talking already. I don't want to miss our man." Auguste obediently accepted his dismissal, and hurried away.

"Let us go in, now," said Fertugue. "This time, if you have no objections, I will do the talking. I don't know yet exactly what I shall say or do. That will depend on the stand Charny takes, but in whatever I see fit to do, I count upon your support."

"That is understood, of course," exclaimed Buzançais. "We will fight or not, exactly as you think proper."

"Agreed," added Carnac; "though so far as I myself am concerned I should prefer to fight."

"Well, I must say I don't care about it," growled Fertugue. "I think my life too precious to stake it against that of a cur."

"I admit that; but it would simplify the situation so much to dispatch him to the other world. Margot is there already. It is only the dead who never return and never speak."

"You forget, my dear fellow, that a duel would cause a great scandal, no matter what the result might be. The count's seconds would not consider themselves obliged to be silent in regard to the cause of the quarrel."

"Where could he find any one willing to act as his second?"

"Oh, he would manage to unearth two scoundrels of his own stamp to serve in that capacity. There are plenty of disreputable characters in Paris."

This conversation took place as they ascended the staircase of the clubhouse. In the hall they met the fencing-master just going out. Fertugue, who knew him by sight, inquired if M. de Charny was still in the fencing-hall, and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, he led the way, closely followed by Carnac and Dr. Buzançais. Philippe had thrown aside his mask, but he was still in his fencing jacket, and was industriously practising parades and difficult passes with the weapon he held in his hand. He met the triumvirate who had declared war against him with an unruffled brow. "So here you are at last, sir," he remarked, addressing Fertugue. "I was about dressing to wait for you upstairs. I had a right, however, to expect that you would come alone."

"My two friends won't be in the way, I'm sure," replied the artist, coldly. "They were present at our first interview, and consequently it is only proper that they should be present at the last."

"If they come in the capacity of seconds, I have no objections to make, though such a mode of procedure is very unusual. I will select mine some time to-day, and they can confer with these gentlemen this evening. Our duel can take place to-morrow morning."

"Excuse me; you seem to think the sole object of this meeting is to make arrangements for a duel between yourself and me. I see that you have even been preparing yourself for the encounter, but I have not yet decided to do you the honour of crossing blades with you."

"Oh, no insolence, if you please. I said yesterday all I have to say to you. My resolution has not changed. If you have decided to spread the calumnies with which you threatened me, I shall speak, and I shall spare neither your lady-love nor her father."

"What do you dare to say?" asked Carnac.

"It is not with you that I have to deal," replied Philippe, scornfully. "I am talking to Monsieur Fertugue, and I declare to him, here and now, that I am no more alarmed by his foul accusations against me than I am afraid to meet him on the field of honour. If he attacks me, I will return him blow for blow; and it will not be my reputation that will suffer most."

"Because it is already ruined beyond redemption," retorted Fertugue, composedly, "while Mademoiselle Gerfaut's is spotless. Nevertheless, I advise you not to engage in the fight. Your charges will not cast even the shadow of a stain upon a young girl who has had nothing to reproach herself with, save an act of imprudence, and we have plenty of evidence to ensure your conviction before the assizes; but for all that I am willing to spare you—on certain conditions—but if you do not accept them——"

"So you are going to begin over again the scene of the other day in the billiard-room?"

"No, that day I granted you a respite. That respite has expired, and I now demand certain guarantees of you. In the first place, you must sign an agreement to disappear, and also a full confession of your crime. This last document will be shown to no one, provided nothing more is heard of you. I shall only keep it as security against any possible breach of faith on your part."

"Then I have only to declare myself guilty of theft, assassination, and the Lord knows what," said the count, ironically. "Is it also necessary for me to certify that Madame de Carouge, my accomplice, blinded Monsieur Gerfaut?"

"That is unnecessary," replied Carnac. "That woman has expiated her crimes, at least in a measure by taking vitriol."

"What is the meaning of this unseemly jest?" asked Charny, in a tone that contrasted strangely with the pallor of his face.

"I am not jesting," replied Carnac, coldly. "Margot's frightful career is ended. You waited for her in vain all night, I hear; you need wait for her no longer. She will never return. But if you wish to know what has become of her, go to the Morgue. She is there. You may identify the body and even claim the money found upon her person if you feel so inclined; but I very much doubt if they will restore it to you."

"Have you murdered her?" faltered Philippe, evidently overcome.

"What do you take me for? Not that you object to assassination yourself, though you generally hire some one to do it for you. Marie Bracieux was hanged by a ruffian whom you hired to perform a task which would have soiled your aristocratic hands. Madame de Carouge, your worthy associate, had more courage than you. She went to the Rue Labat last evening with the laudable intention of destroying the sight of my friends, Marcel Brunier and his sister. She was not only foiled in her attempt, but she received terrible injuries from the vitriol herself, and attaching great value to her beauty, she would not survive its loss. She swallowed unflinchingly a large quantity of sulphuric acid, and died while she was on her way to the hospital—died without having time to make a confession to the commissary of police, who does not even know her name, for in the way of papers she only had on her person some bonds and bank notes; so you will not be troubled on her account. You see every situation has its charms," concluded Carnac, ironically.

The count's expression during the foregoing remarks was worthy of observation. He was evidently ignorant of Margot's tragical death, and strongly doubted the truth of Carnac's story. This death would unquestionably be a crushing blow to him. He no longer had anything to hope for or to fear from his accomplice. It was no longer in her power to betray him, but he was left without resources to struggle alone and unaided against three determined men who had sworn to compel him to leave the country.

"You see that it is absolutely necessary for you to sign this paper," said Fertugue, drawing a document from his pocket as he spoke. "You can read it before putting your name to it. It is hard, of course, to make up your mind to it, but it is not as hard as being condemned to hard labour for life, and you will be if you refuse to sign it, for I shall show you no mercy."

Philippe de Charny took the proffered document, glanced hastily over

it, then tore it in fragments, which he threw at Carnac's feet with an air of defiance. "I regret that you did not also bring Monsieur Brunier with you," he remarked, folding his arms upon his breast.

"Why?" inquired Fertugue, drily.

"Because I intend to kill you all, yourself to begin with."

"Kill us all! that is easily said, but not so easily done," sneered Carnac. "I know that you have just been taking a long lesson in fencing, and that you must have studied any number of unusual passes. The engagement between you and your instructor has been so warm that you have already broken three foils, including the one you now hold in your hand. But you forget that an honourable man does not fight with a scoundrel."

In thus openly insulting the count Carnac was only carrying out a plan which had been suggested to him by the chance which had brought them together in the fencing hall, and by the sight of two broken foils lying upon the floor. The count turned livid, but he did not move. "You will not be allowed to leave this room, Monsieur de Charny," said Fertugue. "My friends here will stand guard over you while I go to the nearest commissary of police and inform him that we have in custody the accomplice of the wretch who killed Marie Bracieux. Remember this is entirely your own doing."

"Go," replied Charny. "I will wait for him here to relate my love affair with Mademoiselle Gerfaut, and tell him of her disgrace."

"You lie?" cried Carnac.

The response was instant. The count rushed at Carnac and struck him in the face. Carnac had courted the blow. It was the pretext by which he hoped to achieve his object; but he had no sooner received it than he flew into a furious passion, and leaping at the count's throat, he nearly strangled him. M. de Charny, like Carnac, was resolved to fight at any cost; but he had not foreseen that his adversary would begin by choking him to death; besides, he wished to engage in a regular duel upon ground of his own selection, and in the presence of four witnesses, while Carnac had an entirely different plan. Fertugue, who did not desire a duel of any kind, hastily interposed and rescued Philippe from Carnac's powerful grasp. As the latter relaxed his hold upon M. de Charny's throat, he gave him a violent push that sent him reeling against the wall. "Ah, so you want to fight, you villain!" he shouted, shaking his fist. "Very well, you shall fight, and sooner than you think."

"In one hour—at Vésinet," faltered the count, who had not yet entirely recovered his breath.

"No, sir! You would decamp if I let you leave this room, and I would not be deprived of the pleasure of running you through the body for the whole universe. It is here that we will fight."

"What are you thinking of, my dear fellow?" protested Fertugue.

"I have received a blow, and I am not disposed to submit to the affront. A blow upon the cheek can only be wiped out with blood, and I am going to show you that nothing is easier." Carnac then stooped, picked up one of the broken blades lying upon the floor, and turning to Philippe de Charny, cried: "The one you hold is also broken. Our weapons are the same. Now for it, count!"

"Here? You must be mad!" replied the nobleman.

"If you refuse you are a coward. On guard, I tell you!" M. de Charny did not obey the injunction, nor did he throw aside his sword. He seemed to hesitate. "What deters you?" cried Carnac impatiently.

"Your blade is at least two inches longer than mine, and the end more pointed. You are in a fencing-jacket, while I wear a coat. That makes no difference to me, however. You can keep on your leather plastron, if you like. Besides, you will have every advantage, as you have just taken a lesson."

"Which is still another reason for declining this absurd proposal. Moreover, you forget that I have no second."

"My friend, Buzançais, will serve you in that capacity; and as he is a physician, he can dress your wounds if you fall."

"I have already had the honour of attending the count," remarked the doctor, ironically.

M. de Charny started at this allusion, which reminded him that his past life placed him at the mercy of his adversaries. He could think of no possible way of escaping them, and, confident of his superiority as a swordsman, and feeling sure that he could kill any one who ventured to cross blades with him, he said to himself: "After such a duel, my opponents won't dare to have me arrested. But it isn't this sculptor that I hate worst."

Fertugue again interposed. "Your plan is absolutely devoid of common sense, my dear fellow," he said; "Monsieur de Charny has violated the conditions of the truce we granted him. There is nothing left for us but to deliver him up to justice. Your fighting with him is not to be thought of."

"It is very easy for you to talk. You did not receive the blow with which my cheek is still tingling. I will have my revenge."

"Here? That would be absurd. Remember that we are in the fencing-hall of a club-house, and that members of the club, or even servants, may drop in at any time."

"That is true. Buzançais, please turn the key, and bolt the door as well. Then there will be no danger of interruption."

The doctor instantly complied with his friend's request, "You see, my dear Fertugue, that Buzançais approves of my plan," continued Carnac, "and now, let me call your attention to the advantages of this duel. If one of the combatants is killed or wounded, we will say that it was a simple accident—that we were guilty of the imprudence of fencing with broken foils, and that this was the result of it. This story will be the more readily believed from the fact that we are not in duelling costume. Besides, the fencing-master will testify, if need be, that foils were broken during the lesson. What do you think of this arrangement, count; does it meet with your approval?"

"I consent," replied Charny. "I consent upon certain conditions, and first, that, instead of fighting with you, I fight with Monsieur Fertugue, who has grossly insulted me."

Fertugue was on the point of replying, but Carnac did not give him time. "I, too, have affronted you," he cried, "and I have been even more gravely affronted. I have given you the lie, and you have given me a blow. Hence, I have a prior claim to satisfaction, and I will yield to no one."

"A prior claim!" repeated Charny. "Then, if I have the good fortune to kill you, I shall be obliged to fight with each of your friends afterwards, I suppose?"

"Not with me," said Fertugue. "I do not consider you a foeman worthy of my steel."

"And I know nothing about the use of the sword," replied Buzançais. "But if you will fight with pistols, I am your man, if you leave this room alive."

"All this is neither here nor there," exclaimed Carnac, impatiently. "The subject under consideration is a duel here in this hall. If there should be another, no one would believe either of them an accident, and that is what people must believe. We are all of us equally interested in giving this impression."

"Then, in case I should be the survivor, do these gentlemen pledge themselves to declare that there was no duel?"

"Of course," replied Carnac, glancing at Fertugue, who seemed undecided.

Fertugue began to think that this strange duel was perhaps the best means of extricating all parties from the trying and dangerous dilemma in which they found themselves. In his secret heart he was not particularly anxious to deliver up to the police a man who would surely have his revenge by slandering Camille, and by accusing Gerfaut of having tried to kill her. He would have much preferred that the scoundrel should take himself off to be hanged elsewhere, though he was unwilling to sacrifice Carnac's life to attain this result; for he strongly suspected that the student of nature was no match for his antagonist, whatever the presumptuous fellow might say to the contrary. Carnac, seeing his friend's perplexity, and divining the cause of it, took him aside and said to him, "My dear fellow, I beg you to let me have my own way in this matter. We now have the opportunity for which we have been waiting so long; do not prevent me from taking advantage of it. At the worst, I shall only be accused of manslaughter through carelessness, and escape with a slight punishment—a few days' imprisonment, perhaps."

"Yes, if Auguste is discreet. He will know what to think of it."

"I have about nine thousand francs left of the money I won, and that will close his mouth pretty effectually, I think."

"All this is very plausible, my dear fellow, but Charny would not have accepted your challenge if he did not consider himself by far the better swordsman of the two. He must be sure of success; and if he kills you——"

"I shall kill him, never fear. Do you imagine I would risk my life rashly, now I have a hope of marrying Mademoiselle Brunier? I shall kill him, rest assured of that. You are not aware that I was one of Merignac's best pupils, and Charny is equally ignorant of the fact. You will probably say that I ought to insist upon his taking off his jacket, but if we fought in our shirt sleeves, no one would regard it as an accident, while if we don't, the affair can be easily explained. We come in and find Monsieur de Charny practising. In jest I pick up a broken foil and propose a trial of skill. He accepts the challenge, and I have the misfortune to wound, and perhaps kill him. That is what we will say, and it will sound plausible."

"But where will you wound him, simpleton that you are? His plastron effectually protects his chest."

"Don't trouble yourself about that. I have a strength of arm that would enable me to pierce the hide of a rhinoceros with a cane, and I know a certain pass which never fails."

"But what am I to do in case the result should be different to what you suppose?"

"You must tell Mademoiselle Brunier that my last thought was for her, and as she would not accept my property, you must do what you think best with the money I have left."

"I have no right to do that; and if you have any legal heirs——"

"I am waiting for you to finish your conversation, gentlemen," said the count, coldly.

While the two friends talked, he had been reflecting. He said to himself that by engaging in a duel, even with Carnac, he would not only run no great risk, but ensure his ultimate safety. You cannot denounce a man after fighting with him, especially when the duel is not conducted in exactly the usual way, and when you have solemnly promised not to disclose the truth, whatever the result of the encounter may be.

"I am at your service. Advance, if you please, count. These gentlemen will stand, one to the right, the other to the left of us. They promise upon their word of honour to preserve the utmost secrecy, whatever the result may be. We will now begin. Come," urged Carnac, taking his stand in the middle of the room. "What are you thinking of? Fertugue won't fight with you, so the best you can do is to try and kill me instead."

"I will try," replied the count, curtly. And, advancing a few steps, he assumed a defensive attitude.

Resigned now to a hostile meeting which it was no longer in his power to prevent, Fertugue approached in his turn. As for Buzançais, who did not evince the slightest desire to interfere, he quietly took his stand at the door, which he had locked on the inside. "It is I who am waiting now, count," sneered Carnac. "Are you afraid of me, or is it the ring I wear on my finger that intimidates you? I shall not take it off, because I hope it will bring me good luck; but it is yours, and I give you permission to take it if you succeed in killing me."

Charny turned pale with anger, and stepped closer to Carnac. Their swords crossed. Firmly planted upon his legs, his head thrown back, and his hand well placed, Carnac had assumed a thoroughly academic pose. No fencing-master could have done better, no matter how formidable his antagonist. The two antagonists gazed at each other in silence several seconds. It was M. de Charny who made the first offensive movement. The end of his sword grazed Carnac's hand, but did not reach his breast. The blow was successfully parried, and the return thrust followed with such bewildering rapidity that the weapon made a rent in the count's fencing-jacket. "Too low!" muttered the student of nature, between his set teeth. "It is not there I want to wound him."

Philippe now realised that he had a swordsman of the very first order to contend with, an antagonist who would be quick to profit by the slightest mistake, and who, moreover, had the advantage of him in the matter of height. "Take care, count," sneered Carnac. "If you go on with such fury, we shall be sure to disfigure each other, and then if one of us should be killed people won't believe that the death was the result of an accident. No unsightly scratching, I beg."

These sarcastic remarks exasperated M. de Charny, who redoubled his thrusts, but with no better success than before. "Gentlemen," suddenly said Buzançais, "I must warn you that some one is fumbling at the lock outside."

"Then it is time to put an end to this," growled Carnac. And instantly assuming the offensive, he made a series of rapid thrusts so skilfully that

Charny's guard was broken. Feeling himself lost, Philippe attempted a straightforward lunge, but Carnac executed a side thrust, then a carte over the arms, and his foil, driven with herculean strength, penetrated the count's throat, just below the clavicle, and he fell like a lump of lead. "Marie Bracieux is avenged, and Camille also," said Gerfaut's pupil, flinging down his weapon. "Open the door, doctor; and then come here to the aid of Monsieur de Charny, whom I have wounded unintentionally."

Buzançais had foreseen the contingency, and was ready to play his part to perfection. After noiselessly pushing back the bolt which he had drawn before the duel began, he hastened to Philippe de Charny, and knelt beside him. Carnac, greatly agitated, pushed Fertugue towards the door, saying in a low tone: "We have not a moment to lose if we wish our report of the affair to be believed. Open the door as quick as you can, and call any members of the club you can find."

Fertugue also realised the importance of losing no time, so he rushed to the door to find himself face to face with Auguste, who for some minutes had vainly been trying to obtain admission. "Quick, quick! a physician!" Fertugue cried. "While amusing himself by fencing with my friend here, Monsieur de Charny has just been wounded in the throat."

"Wounded! Why, he is dead!" said Auguste. "And this time I shall indeed have to bid good-bye to my fifteen thousand francs."

"I have nine thousand that are at your service," whispered Carnac, "and Monsieur Fertugue will make up the balance on condition that——"

"I understand. I am to tell no one that you locked yourselves in to fight. For it was a duel, was it not?"

"It was conducted fairly."

"So far as you yourselves were concerned, I haven't the slightest doubt of it; but if Charny had killed you I should have proclaimed upon the housetops that it was an assassination. Very fortunately he was the victim."

This low-toned conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the liveried footmen Fertugue brought with him. "Yes, all is over," said Buzançais, rising to his feet. "The right carotid artery has been completely severed. Death was instantaneous. This is what comes from fencing with one's throat bare. The very same thing might have happened to Carnac."

"Will you take it upon yourself to explain all this satisfactorily to the commissary?" cried Cambron, who had arrived.

"That is absolutely necessary," replied Fertugue, "and I beg you will send for one immediately. He must see the body before it is moved, and in the meantime I call you all to witness that Monsieur de Charny fell with his foil in his hand. These gentlemen, unfortunately, conceived the idea of trying their skill in fencing, and were so imprudent as to use broken foils. My friend did not even take the precaution to put on a fencing jacket. It was impossible to foresee that the sport would end in such a catastrophe. Nevertheless, I did all that was in my power to stop them, but they would not listen to me. As the fencing went on, they became excited. Monsieur de Charny made an unfortunate parade, which caused his opponent's weapon to fly up in the air, and the thrust which was aimed at his plastron, penetrated his throat."

The commissary at length arrived, and the inquiry that followed was a long and most minute one, but before the close of the day, the three

friends were released, on condition they presented themselves promptly if the authorities decided to pursue the investigation of this excusable homicide any further.

Carnac was at liberty to return to Gerfaut's studio.

He had a long conversation with his master, after which he hastened off to inform Annette and her brother that Charney had gone to rejoin his accomplice. Marcel no longer had a rival; Annette and Camille no longer had an enemy; and for this good fortune they were all indebted to Jean Carnac.

---

## EPILOGUE.

THREE months have passed. Spring-time has come. It is the season for lucky marriages. Camille Gerfaut was married yesterday to Marcel Brunier, and Annette Brunier to Jean Carnac. It was not all smooth sailing, by any means, before this fortunate winding-up was reached. The count's sudden and tragical death had aroused suspicions; and Carnac and his friends were plied with questions, their every movement was closely watched, and careful inquiries were made concerning their antecedents. In fact, they but narrowly escaped arrest. The necessity of extricating themselves from this dangerous, false position was apparent, so Carnac, after a consultation with his friends, began by telling Gerfaut the whole truth, and Gerfaut unhesitatingly advised him to reveal everything to the representatives of the law. Carnac thereupon went boldly to the public prosecutor, and related to him the whole story of Philippe and Margot's career. Witnesses were plentiful, and they were all granted a hearing. Gerfaut and his daughter, Marcel Brunier and his sister, Jeanne Plantin, Madame Langoumois—all testified that the events had occurred exactly as Carnac related—all, even the rascal Auguste, who did not hesitate to admit that he had assisted the count in enticing Camille from her home. And as they were dealing with just and enlightened magistrates, who realised that the dead were the only guilty parties in this strange affair, and that the living did not deserve to be prosecuted, inasmuch as they had solely acted in self-defence, the investigation was soon closed, and the facts it revealed were kept a secret, so that the reputations of the interested persons might not suffer. In fact, the investigation proved to be an excellent thing, as it fully opened the eyes of Camille Gerfaut and Annette Brunier to the dangers they had passed through, and to the merits of their defenders. It lasted long enough for Camille to acquire a just appreciation of Marcel's good qualities, and for her heart to be touched by the faithful fellow's unselfish love. As for Annette, her fate was already sealed. She had given her heart to Carnac, and now she only asked to give him her hand.

Camille insisted upon dowering her friend handsomely, and Gerfaut interested himself in procuring orders for his only pupil. The young people accepted this help without any false shame, and the money won at the card table was used to repay Auguste, who, although he was undoubtedly a rascal, had rendered very valuable assistance in extricating Camille from the trap into which he had led her. The money and

securities found upon the person of the so-called Madame de Carouge remain in the custody of the authorities, no one having appeared to claim them. Jeanne Plantin acts as housekeeper at Gerfaut's, under the superintendence of Cousin Brigitte. Her children are being educated at the expense of the sculptor, and the latter also pays a pension to the widow of poor Graindorge, who died on the policeman's field of honour, that is to say, in pursuing an assassin. Madame Langoumois, on her side, received a handsome reward, in addition to the Count de Charny's ring, which Carnac gave to her, and which she keeps in remembrance of her old customer.

Paris is cursed or blessed with a very poor memory ; and the Count de Charny and Margot with the scar are already forgotten. But the race of impoverished and unscrupulous noblemen and of wealthy adventuresses is not yet extinct ; and the club which old Cambron manages is still the favourite haunt of sharpers and their dupes.

THE END.

42, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,

September, 1885.

## VIZETELLY & CO.'S LATEST PUBLICATIONS.

---

NEW WORK BY THE AUTHOR OF "SIDE-LIGHTS  
ON ENGLISH SOCIETY"

*In large post 8vo, cloth gilt, price 9s.*

### IMPRISONED IN A SPANISH CONVENT:

AN ENGLISH GIRL'S EXPERIENCES.

By E. C. GRENVILLE-MURRAY.

ILLUSTRATED WITH NUMEROUS PAGE AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.

---

NEW STORY BY THE AUTHOR OF THE CHEVELEY NOVELS.

*In Crown 8vo, tastefully bound, price 3s. 6d.*

### HIS CHILD FRIEND.

By the Author of "A MODERN MINISTER," "SAUL WEIR," "SOULS AND CITIES," &c.

---

*In Crown 8vo, neatly bound, price 6s.*

### PRINCE ZILAH.

By JULES CLARETIE.

*Translated from the 57th French edition, and forming Vol. XI. of VIZETELLY'S  
ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.*

---

*In post 8vo, cloth gilt, price 3s. 6d.*

### NO ROSE WITHOUT A THORN, AND OTHER TALES.

By F. C. BURNAND, H. SAVILE CLARKE, R. E. FRANCILLON, &c.

*Illustrated with numerous Page and other Engravings from Designs by R. CALDECOTT,  
LINLEY SAMBOURNE, M. E. EDWARDS, F. DADD, &c.*

"There is much that is original and clever in these 'Society' tales."—*Athenæum*.

"Many of the stories are of the greatest merit; and, indeed, with such contributors the reader might be sure of the unusual interest and amusement which these volumes supply."—*Daily Telegraph*.

*In post 8vo, cloth gilt, price 3s. 6d.*

## THE DOVE'S NEST, AND OTHER TALES.

By JOSEPH HATTON, RICHARD JEFFERIES, H. SAVILE CLARKE, &c.

*Illustrated with numerous Page and other Engravings from designs by*

R. CALDECOTT, CHARLES KEENE, M. E. EDWARDS, ADELAIDE CLAXTON, &c.

"We strongly advise the reader to begin with 'How one ghost was laid,' and to follow it up with 'Jack's wife,' with whom by the way is portrayed both by artist and author he cannot fail to fall in love. These two graceful little extravaganzas will put him into so excellent a temper that he will thoroughly enjoy the good things that follow."—*Life*.

---

*New and Cheaper Edition, 440 pages, price 3s. 6d.*

## A MUMMER'S WIFE.

By GEORGE MOORE, Author of "A Modern Lover."

*See Press Notices on page 5 of General Catalogue.*

---

## THE BOULEVARD NOVELS,

A NEW SERIES OF TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH.

*In small 8vo, attractively bound, 2s. 6d.*

I.

## NANA'S DAUGHTER.

A STORY OF PARISIAN LIFE.

By ALFRED SIRVEN and HENRI LEVERDIER.

*From the 25th French Edition.*

---

NEW VOLUMES OF DU BOISGOBEY'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

*1s. each.*

## THE DAY OF RECKONING. 2 Vols.

"Travellers at this season of the year will find the time occupied by a long journey pass away as rapidly as they can desire with one of Du Boisgobey's absorbing volumes in their hand."—*London Figaro*.

## THE SEVERED HAND.

"M. du Boisgobey gives us no tiresome descriptions or laboured analyses of character; under his facile pen plots full of incident are quickly opened and unwound. He does not stop to moralise; all his art consists in creating intricacies which shall keep the reader's curiosity on the stretch, and offer a full scope to his own really wonderful ingenuity for unravelling."—*Times*.

## BERTHA'S SECRET.

"A most effective romance, depending for its interest on the skillful weaving and unweaving of mysteries. 'Bertha's Secret' is very well worth perusal."—*Times*.

## VIZETELLY'S SIXPENNY SERIES OF AMUSING BOOKS.

*In picture cover, price 6d.*

### MATRIMONY BY ADVERTISEMENT;

AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST.

By CHARLES G. PAYNE.

*With a Frontispiece and Other Engravings.*

#### CONTENTS:

MATRIMONY BY ADVERTISEMENT.—A SPELL IN A MADHOUSE AS AN AMATEUR MANIAC.—A DAY ON A HANSON AS AN AMATEUR CABBIE.—THE ROBBERS' VAPE MURDER.—A STUDY OF BARBERS.—TWENTY YEARS' PENAL SERVITUDE.—A TALK WITH A BIRMINGHAM THIEF.

*Uniform with the above and by the same Author.*

### VOTE FOR POTTLEBECK!

THE STORY OF A POLITICIAN IN LOVE.

DEDICATED TO THE VOTERS AND CANDIDATES AT THE APPROACHING GENERAL ELECTION.

*Illustrated with a Frontispiece and other Engravings.*

NEW SATIRICAL POEM, BY A WELL-KNOWN POET.

*In Crown 8vo, price 1s.*

### LUCIFER IN LONDON,

AND HIS REFLECTIONS ON LIFE, MANNERS, AND THE PROSPECTS OF SOCIETY.

"Shows a good deal of observation, and reflects the spirit of the age in making Lucifer intellectually curious and easily bored."—*Poll Mall Gazette*.

"Decidedly witty and original."—*Sunday Times*.

*In Paper Cover, 1s.*

### PATTER POEMS,

HUMOROUS AND SERIOUS.

FOR READINGS AND RECITATIONS.

By WALTER PARKE.

Author of "Lays of the Saintly ; or, the New Golden Legend," "Songs of Singularity," &c.

*With Illustrations by J. Leitch.*

*In Pamphlet Form, price 3d.*

### LITERATURE AT NURSE ;

OR, CIRCULATING MORALS.

ADDRESSED TO ALL LITERARY MEN AND TO THE SUBSCRIBERS TO SELECT CIRCULATING LIBRARIES.

By GEORGE MOORE, Author of "A Mummer's Wife," "A Modern Lover," &c.

*In paper cover, 1s. ; or in parchment binding, gilt on side, 2s. 6d.*

ADMIRABLY SUITED FOR PRIVATE REPRESENTATION.

## THE PASSER-BY:

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT.

By FRANÇOIS COPPÉE, of the French Academy.

TRANSLATED, WITH THE AUTHOR'S SANCTION, FROM THE 41ST FRENCH EDITION,  
By Luigi, Author of "The Red Cross," &c.

"A translation exceedingly well done."—*Whitehall Review*.

The following will be ready about the end of September.

*Crown 8vo, 5s.*

## UNDER THE SUN.

ESSAYS MAINLY WRITTEN IN HOT COUNTRIES.

FORMING THE SECOND VOLUME OF THE CHOICER MISCELLANEOUS WORKS  
OF GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

*Illustrated with an etched Portrait of the Author, and various Page Engravings.*

A SMALL NUMBER OF COPIES OF THE ABOVE WORK HAVE BEEN PRINTED IN DEMY OCTAVO.  
ON HAND-MADE PAPER, WITH THE ILLUSTRATIONS ON INDIA PAPER MOUNTED.

NEW VOLUMES OF ZOLA'S REALISTIC NOVELS.

*In crown 8vo, price 5s. each.*

I.

## THE RUSH FOR THE SPOIL (LA CURÉE).

TRANSLATED FROM THE 27TH FRENCH EDITION.

II.

## THE LADIES' PARADISE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE 50TH FRENCH EDITION.

III.

## THERÈSE RAQUIN.

"THE RUSH FOR THE SPOIL" AND "THERÈSE RAQUIN"

*Will be also published, illustrated with Tinted Page Engravings, price 6s. each work.*

TO BE FOLLOWED BY

IV.

## THE FORTUNE OF THE ROUGONS.

V.

## ABBÉ MOURET'S TEMPTATION.

VI.

## A LOVE EPISODE.

# ZOLA'S POWERFUL REALISTIC NOVELS.

*In Crown 8vo, price 6s. each.*

---

## NANA:

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 127TH FRENCH EDITION.

*Illustrated with Twenty-four Tinted Page Engravings, by French Artists.*

**Mr. HENRY JAMES on "NANA."**

"A novelist with a system, a passionate conviction, a great plan—incontestable attributes of M. Zola—is not now to be easily found in England or the United States, where the story-teller's art is almost exclusively feminine, is mainly in the hands of timid (even when very accomplished) women, whose acquaintance with life is severely restricted, and who are not conspicuous for general views. The novel, moreover, among ourselves, is almost always addressed to young unmarried ladies, or at least always assumes them to be a large part of the novelist's public.

"This fact, to a French story-teller, appears, of course, a damnable restriction, and M. Zola would probably decline to take *au sérieux* any work produced under such unnatural conditions. Half of life is a sealed book to young unmarried ladies, and how can a novel be worth anything that deals only with half of life? These objections are perfectly valid, and it may be said that our English system is a good thing for virgins and boys, and a bad thing for the novel itself, when the novel is regarded as something more than a simple *jeu d'esprit*, and considered as a composition that treats of life at large and helps us to *know*."

---

## THE "ASSOMMOIR;"

(The Prelude to "NANA.")

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 97TH FRENCH EDITION.

*Illustrated with Sixteen Tinted Page Engravings, by French Artists.*

---

## PIPING HOT!

(*"POT-BOUILLE."*)

TRANSLATED FROM THE 63RD FRENCH EDITION.

*Illustrated with Sixteen Page Engravings by French Artists.*

---

## GERMINAL; OR, MASTER AND MAN.

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 47TH FRENCH EDITION.

The above Works are published without Illustrations, price 5s. each.

---

*Shortly. Uniform with the above Volumes.*

THE RUSH FOR THE SPOIL.

THERÈSE RAQUIN.

THE LADIES' PARADISE.

---

## SAPPHO.

By ALPHONSE DAUDET.

FROM THE 100TH FRENCH EDITION.

THE BOULEVARD NOVELS,  
A NEW SERIES OF TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH.  
*In small 8vo, attractively bound, 2s. 6d.*

I.

## NANA'S DAUGHTER.

A STORY OF PARISIAN LIFE.  
By ALFRED SIRVEN and HENRI LEVERDIER.  
*From the 25th French Edition.*

*In Picture Cover, price 6d.*

## MATRIMONY BY ADVERTISEMENT, AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST.

By CHARLES G. PAYNE.  
*With a Frontispiece and other Engravings.*

### CONTENTS.

Matrimony by Advertisement.	The Robber's Vade Mecum.
A Spell in a Madhouse as an Amateur Maniac.	A Study of Barbers.
A Day on a Hansom as an Amateur Cabby.	Twenty Years' Penal Servitude.
	A Talk with a Birmingham Thief.

*Uniform with the above and by the same Author.*

## VOTE FOR POTTLEBECK!

THE STORY OF A POLITICIAN IN LOVE.  
DEDICATED TO THE VOTERS AND CANDIDATES AT THE APPROACHING GENERAL ELECTION.  
*Illustrated with a Frontispiece and other Engravings.*

*Price 1s.*

NEW SATIRICAL POEM BY A WELL-KNOWN POET.  
**LUCIFER IN LONDON,**  
AND HIS REFLECTIONS ON LIFE, MANNERS, AND THE PROSPECTS  
OF SOCIETY.

VIZETELLY & CO., 42, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,  
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS AND BOOKSTALLS.

